

FOLK-DANCE OF INDIA

Projesh Banerji

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By

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PREFACE.

AN exhaustive work on this subject is absolutely impossible, for the very simple reason that there are always changes in the form of any particular dance from one village to another, and India being a vast country and having innumerable folk-dances, one life-time is insufficient to record them. But this book will be a guide, stimulus and a stepping-stone from which others may work on the subject. One may either take one province and try to explore all its regions for this precious art of folk-dancing; or one may start with just one district. In this way there is a possibility of bringing to light material of great ethnological interest.

I have deliberately taken into consideration the most important folk-dances of India and have discarded the insignificant ones, not wishing to make the book unnecessarily lengthy by incorporating every detail.

I have arranged the folk-dances dance-wise. The provinces are not treated according to their political boundaries, but are divided from the point of view of dance. The following chapters and consequently the dance-provinces have been arranged with due

regard to the different degrees in which they present aesthetic culture and grace.

I am greatly indebted to the late Mr. G. S. Dutt, I.C.S., who kindly helped me, by narrating the various types of folk-dances prevalent in Bengal, by explaining to me the ideals of *Bratachari** and also by supplying the necessary literature.

ALLAHABAD
June 14, 1943

PROJESH BANERJI

*See Chapter on Bengal.

PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION

I AM glad that the people of my country and the present Government are taking too much interest these days in the dance culture of our village brethren, the culture which was a forgotten art and which was pooh poohed by the urban population for being obscene and rough at some places and for lack of decorum and decency. The task of refining and polishing is in the hands of art lovers. They should not shun folk-art for its not being sophisticated and for want of embellishments.

I am also pleased to find that with the growth of interest in people towards folk-art, there is a popular demand for this book, and my readers will be glad to have accounts of more folk-dance items in the present work than in the former ones.

I have included only a few folk-dances of Pakistan and Ceylon as well in this book, treating the old provinces of India as part of our present country, because the same spirit of rural culture flows throughout and political divisions of these countries and of the States do not put obstacles to the method of treatment, which has been done viewing the importance of dance art.

If through this present edition I satisfy to a certain extent my readers, as I was able to do by my previous editions, I will deem myself to be fortunate to have performed my duty towards them and to my country.

My acknowledgments are due to Sangeeta Natak Akademy, New Delhi, for supplying me most of the illustrations which adorn this work and for giving me permission to publish them.

ALLAHABAD
May 15, 1959

PROJESH BANERJI

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The very existence of folk-dance implies a certain complexity of development in the social order; and also even by its name, implies a distinction based more or less roughly on this complexity, whereby the ruder arts of the less cultured members of society are distinguished from the more sophisticated arts of the educated classes. In a primitive community the whole body of persons comprising, it, is the 'folk' and in the best sense of the word it might be applied to the entire population of any community. In its common application, however, in such compounds as 'folk-lore', 'folk-music', etc., it is narrowed down to include only those who are mainly outside the current of urban culture and systematic education, the unlettered or little-lettered inhabitants of village and countryside.

In a simple community, where all dancing is of the folk, this distinction between the art of the poor peasant and his more educated brethren only arises when, with social progress, art-forms split away, developing a self-conscious technique and becoming the province of a profession, and of the cultured. We may say that folk-dancing is that dancing which has developed among the peasantry, and is maintained by them in a fluid tradition without the aid of the professional dancer, teacher or artiste; and is not, at least in its particular form,

*Folk D.
Defined*

observed and practised in towns on the stage, or in the ball-room.

There is, however, as marked a distinction between folk-dancing and primitive dancing, as there is between folk-dancing and the refined classical dancing of more cultured people. Unlike classical dance, folk-dance was made for the sheer pleasure of the performers, and not for the entertainment of the public; while the primitive and aboriginal dancing was nothing but a spontaneous and emotional rhythmic expression preparatory to a ritual or battle. Folk-dance, with the progress of civilisation, has developed from aboriginal dancing, and this less primitive form of dance discards much of the spontaneity, crudeness and the occasional indecency of the other. Nevertheless, primitive dance was the foundation of folk-dance; and folk-dance was the foundation of the refined forms. Refined dance when degenerates re-enters the category of folk-dance, just as folk-dance with culture and development ascends to that of refined dance.

Emotion as expressed in the classical dance of the stage is artificial; whereas in folk-dance it is original and natural. As man becomes civilised and enlightened, and therefore more conscious of his "Self", shyness assails him, driving away simplicity. This can easily be detected by a comparison of children with adults. Children are less "self-conscious" and, therefore, more free from that shyness of expressing emotions, which comes with age and culture. Similarly there is a correspondingly less free play and expression of emotion in folk-dance than in that of thoroughly primitive peoples.

Folk-dance is of great national importance and

aesthetic value. There is quite a lot of truth in Washington Irving's remark that the character of a people is often to be learnt from their amusements; "for in the hour of mirth, the mind is unrestrained and takes its natural bent". And so it may not be too much to say that progress in the art of dancing reflects a progress in civilisation; and that to record the advance made by any nation in this art is to record its approach towards refinement. The folk-dancing of a nation is the nation's mirror, in that it manifests to some extent the nation's temperament, art, culture, simplicity, social status, customs and creed.

Although one must necessarily place rural art in a lower scale of value, both culturally and artistically, than the more sophisticated forms which have acquired the appellation of "classic art"; a more intimate acquaintance with, and a correct appreciation of the rural arts of India will reveal the fact that in their own way they display a profundity of philosophical conception, an integrity of feeling and a standard of virile and artistic expression which are in no way inferior to those found in the sophisticated forms of art and dance which have been accorded a wider notice in the art world. In some ways one may even say that the folk-dances are of an even greater significance in that they are a direct and unsophisticated expression of the innermost spirit of India.

Pastoral man, living close to Nature, and entirely dependent on her for his everyday need, is inevitably much affected by the natural phenomena of his environment. Consequently, the national and folk-dances of a country are much influenced in atmosphere and theme by these natural circumstances, as by the geographical

Folk & Primitive

Emotions in Classical Dance

Content-

Environment

conditions prevailing in the areas to which they belong. For instance, throughout the dances of Hawaii, there recurs a swaying movement of the hips, while the palms of the outstretched hands keep up a slow fluttering movement. The hip movement has been taken from the waving of the palm-trees by the lazy Pacific breeze, and the hand movements from the ripples of the calm sea which surrounds the island.

This influence of natural environment on the movements of the dance is perhaps to some extent responsible for the difference between the energetic activity of the dance of the West, with its generally exhilarating climate; and the gentler swaying movements of that of the East with its heavy atmosphere drained by the hot sun of all incentive to physical energy.

In India, owing to the diversity of the climate and topography, characteristic peculiarities are evinced in individual Indian dances. In Manipur dance, for example, are many abrupt sittings and vigorous swayings of the upper portion of the body with the arms stretched upwards. Manipur is a mountainous country, whose hills are clad with mighty forests, subject to the violence of frequent storms, which vigorously agitate the trees and often even uproot them. The abrupt sittings symbolise the uprooting of the trees, and the agitated movement of the body from the waist upwards is a figure of the swaying of the trees.

One finds the dances of the plains comparatively much milder in expression than those of the hilly places or of regions abounding in jungle, or subject to cold. There are dances among the jungle tribes, in which the dominant feature is the enactment of the roles of tigers, wolves and elephants;

the presence of these beasts being a perpetual influence in the minds of people whose whole lives are passed in an ever-watchful endeavour to protect themselves and their animals from the onslaught of their less peaceful fellow-denizens of the jungle.

The influence of the folk-dance may be seen today in the vestigial movements from it that persist in certain social and religious ceremonies. These have become very little more than simple ritualistic gestures accompanied by solemn walking instead of the rhythmic strikings of the hands and feet as in the distant past, when these ceremonies were formulated. For example, in the "Barana" ceremony of the bridegroom, when he is received by the bride's parents, he is first met by the mother of the bride, who bears aloft a large brass plate with symbolic gifts of fruit and flowers, which she offers to him during her solemn seven-fold encirclement of the place where he stands. After this a procession of seven married women makes seven circuits of the groom, carrying other symbols of prosperity, happiness, divine blessing, etc.

There are also found dances akin to the Indian ones in various other parts of the world which does seem to point to the fact that the people of other countries suffered similar reactions to the fundamental things in their lives, and interpreted them similarly through the medium of their dancing, for example, the masked dances of the Aleutian Islands, Alaska, Tibet, Kamschatka, and Africa; the religious dances of Bali; and the social dances of Mexico. The arts of these people developed during the ages, resembling each other closely in many ways, and yet, of course, quite unaffected by each other; as there is not necessarily

any definite ethnological link between these countries.

Uday Shankar rightly points out that every Indian is a dancer. Eightyfive per cent of the Indian population consists of the peasantry, and a correspondingly high proportion of the country's choreographic art is kept alive in the villages and countryside. It is evident from the movements of the villagers, especially the women, that their gait is by nature graceful, and this grace can be best exemplified in the everyday scenes of village-life; where the peasant girl carries a pitcher of water on her head with the stately ease of a queen; or swings along with a lithe, free movement from the waist, in no way hampered by the child astride her hip; and since all village women adorn their feet with jingling anklets, the rhythm of the dance is called to mind most vividly as they move gracefully about their daily tasks; wholly unconscious of the loveliness of their easy and statuesque poise.

The peasant has an instinctive knowledge of rhythm, and his simple orchestra includes innumerable time-giving instruments of diverse shapes and sizes, which he is adept at playing, and all the village dances are accompanied by them.

Art receives its greatest inspiration from religion, whether that art be painting, architecture, literature, music or dancing. It may be that in the West, modern dancing has little, if any, religious inspiration; but this is not the case in India. Religion is the background here. One finds that the dance themes mostly depict scenes or episodes from the stories of mythology and scripture.

Before attempting to make any distinctive classification of the indigenous folk-dances of India, it may be noted at the outset, that they can roughly

be divided into two broad classes, viz., the women's dances and the men's dances. The sexes do not generally take part in dancing together, except in a very few communities such as Santhals and other aboriginal tribes. The dances may then be divided into three main classes: (i) social—these being semi-religious and connected with seasonal festivals, (2) purely religious, and (3) martial. It is, however, never possible to place a particular dance exclusively in any one of these main classes, as most dances, though predominantly religious or social, bear many traces of other themes.

It is difficult to draw the line between social and ceremonial dances. To assign, as is sometimes done, a religious origin to social dancing as a whole, seems in the face of the evidence, dangerous; for the folk-lore is well aware that that which is serious ritual in one generation may become merely the adult amusement of the next, and perhaps even the children's game of the phase following.

Though there is evidence of borrowing from ceremonial sources in some social types of dance, it would be incautious, when considering this subject, to forget that man's impulse to amusement is general and early; and thence to read symbolism into obvious actions of the body, into the natural formations of which a number of dance movements may fall.

Most of those dances, originally seasonal or ceremonial, have in many cases become little more than a casual periodic diversion and show, but they still retain sufficient of their early character from which inferences about their origin may be drawn. The festivals and ceremonies with which they are now linked, are also to some extent another clue as to their pristine significance; however much

classes
a. male
b. female
i. social
ii. Religion
iii. martial

the performers themselves may have forgotten about their meanings. Dances belonging to the third category, those martial or heroic in character, are not so widespread except among the tribesmen of the remote hills and the forests; but one may still come across these here and there; now very mild in their bellicosity; and again little more than an almost forgotten memory of those choreographic stimuli for war which aroused the blood lust of their early forefathers.

CHAPTER II

THE DECCAN

In this chapter will be considered all those dance forms current among the communities of South India, from the Vindhya mountains to the southernmost tip of the Peninsula; including that strip of land to the east of the Western Ghats extending from Bombay to Cape Comorin. In this area with its older civilisation, derived from the Dravidian culture of pre-Aryan times, a more conservative people have preserved their ancient customs uninfluenced by the currents of modern thought.

The Deccan is the home of a number of styles of dancing; and mythology and history offer ample evidence, in legend and in fact, to show that dancing was by no means an unknown art to the people inhabiting these regions as far back as earliest times.

Popular tradition has it that the art was first introduced here from the North. Far back in those days when the Aryan occupation was in its initial stages in Northern India, it was the practice among the rulers there to banish those who fell from the royal favour to the still unexplored and supposedly wild South. Thus the hero-god Rama was forced to wander South; and the Pandava brothers, heroes of the ancient epic, the Mahabharata, likewise took refuge there, when they lost their wealth and kingdom to a cousin in a tournament.

of dice-play. And it is in connection with this legend that we first hear of the origin of the art of dancing in the Deccan; for there is a story prevalent even now among the people of Mangalore that the classical "Bharata Natya" (*lit.* Dance of India) was first taught there by one of these royal brothers. The story relates that these five Pandava brothers, ashamed of their ignominious defeat, went disguised as humble folk to the court of king Virata, whose ancient kingdom of Matsya-Desh was situated in Central India to the south of Delhi. Here they sought work, and the third and most splendid of the five, Arjuna, in the guise of a female dancing teacher, was commissioned to instruct Virata's daughter in this art. As far as the story goes the art received wide appreciation in this kingdom and from there spread further south until it was known throughout the Deccan which to this day has remained the home of the pure dance-form—Bharata Natya.

Another common legend tells how later in life, after his rehabilitation in his own kingdom, this accomplished hero travelled as a pilgrim as far south as the Mahendra hills and came to the city of Manipur. Manipur, or Manikapattam of the Mahabharata, was a seaport at the mouth of Lake Chilka, and once the capital of Kalinga. Chitrabhanu, its king, had a daughter named Chitrangada, an accomplished girl, talented as an artiste. It is conjectured that Arjuna, himself a lover of music and painting and dance artiste *par excellence*, was attracted by Chitrangada's artistic temperament, and so taught her the art of dancing; and from this court it was spread throughout the length and breadth of the Deccan.

Still another of these old legends deals with this

same subject. One of the wives of Arjuna was Ulupi, the daughter of Pundarika, who ruled over the kingdom of Nagaloka in Patala (south). Now according to ancient lore all creation is divided into three regions—the upper region or heaven; the middle region or earth; and the lower region, called Patala; the whole being upheld by the hood of a huge serpent or "naga". Thus the floor of Patala—the lower region, was the head of the "naga", and since it was a region of torment, was inhabited by venomous snakes, fire, etc. It seems that this myth has in the instance of this story been taken as an analogy, whereby the three regions of creation are symbolised by the Himalayas for the higher regions, Hindustan for the middle region, the Deccan with its little known forests and jungles for the lower region or Patala; and so Arjuna is supposed to have taught the arts of music and dancing to Ulupi who thus charmed into submission the Nagaloka, or fearsome inhabitants of her father's dread kingdom.

Later, after the dark periods of myth and legend, one finds during the Buddhist period of history scattered references to the existence and development of the art of dancing; for instance, there exists a brief reference to Ambapata, a famous dancer at the court of Visala, and then of her successor, Salawati;¹ and also there is an inscription of the Chalukya dynasty of Badami, early in the eighth century, which records gifts made by a dancer to a temple.²

¹ R. S. Hardy: "A Manual of Buddhism", London, 1853, p. 244.

² B. G. i Pt. 11 (1896) 372, 394.

Then later on, after the decline of Buddhism, and contemporary with the revival of Hinduism, history tells us that the dynasty of Hoysala Ballalas, who held supreme sway in Mysore from about A.D. 1000 to 1300, erected several temples or groups of temples, to the newly popular religion. Among these, the famous temple at Belur owed its origin to the building enthusiasm of Vishnuvardhan, the last and greatest of this line, whose activities were brought to an end before his greatest temple reached completion, when the kingdom suffered the Mohammedan invasion of A.D. 1310.

In this temple, a Mahamandap, or big platform of black marble, where she could dance before the gods, was erected by Vishnuvardhan for his queen, Nritya Saraswati. Queen Nritya Saraswati was famed as the foremost dancer of her time, and crowds were thrilled by her exquisitely executed movements and poses, as she performed on the great smooth circular slab of black marble before the presiding Vaishnavite deity of this sacred theatre, Chenna Kesava.

The Deccan is famous for its many temples with similar Mahamandaps or dancing platforms, on which later the Devadasis danced before the gods in order to please and propitiate them. In Kolaba, instead of a platform, there is a dancing girls' palace known as Kalavanti Chaveda, where formerly ceremonial dances were performed.

Folk-dancing in the Deccan remains unexplained if the art, customs and life of the Devadasis are not dealt with. They played an important role not only in the Deccan, but in every part of the country. Most of the refined and classic forms of dance known today were preserved in their pure form by the temple Devadasis. But in so far as

their art has any important significance in a study of folk-dancing, it should be remembered that the development of tribal dancing into folk-dancing, and of folk-dancing into the highly stylised classic form, and then the degeneration of that again into the ruder forms, with innumerable and indefinable intermediate grades, is an endless cycle; so that while in some few temples the art of the Devadasis was pure Bharata Natya, in many others it was practised in less refined forms which were often taken from locally prevailing folk-dances. There was, in the course of time, a continual interchange of movement and gesture between the various types of dance but the Devadasis, as an officially established and supported class of dancers, became the depository of much that might have otherwise been lost to the art of dancing and were also an energetic force in society to keep alive its dance traditions and to continually impregnate it with new enthusiasm and ideals.

The rise of the dancing caste and its somewhat euphemistic name (Devadasi—servant of God) seems to date from the ninth and tenth centuries A.D., during which time most of the temples were built in South India. The dancing girls' duties were to fan the idol with palm-leaf fans or Tibetan ox-tails, to carry the sacred light called Kumbarti, and to sing and dance before the deity when it was carried in procession.

Inscriptions show¹ that in A.D. 1001, the great temple of the Chola King, Rajaraja of Tanjore, had attached to it four hundred "*talic cheri*

¹ "South Indian Inscriptions" ed. E. Hutzsh, Madras (1890-1903), ii Pt. iii, p. 259.

pendugal" or "women of the temple", who lived in free quarters in the four streets surrounding it, and were allowed tax-free land out of its endowments. Other temples had similar arrangements. At the beginning of the last century there were one hundred dancing girls attached to the great temple at Conjeeveram;¹ and at Madura, Conjeeveram and Tanjore there are still numbers of them who received allowances from the endowments of the big temples of those places. In former days, the profession was supported not only by the temple, but also by the State.

Broadly speaking, temple servants and temple dancers belong to more or less the same class, and they each practise similar rites and customs, although technically there are some slight differences of caste. Temple servants, however, consist mostly of the males of the community, whereas temple dancers are invariably women.

Though the system of Devadasis in Hindu temples has been officially abolished by provincial legislation for the last thirty years; and although they now rarely dance publicly in any of the great temples, they still follow all their old customs and ways of living. Today they officiate only in the villages where they are to be seen at festivals and social ceremonies.

In the past, a dancer was sometimes known to attain to great power and influence, such as the famous temple dancer of Ujjain, Devadatta, spoken of at length by the historian Samadeva. In their decline, however, temple dancers fell into great

¹ F. Buchanan, "Journey from Madras", London, 1807, i 12f.

disrepute with the better class Hindus, on account of the general corruption that became prevalent among them, and were regarded as beings quite outside the pale of decent society, although their services in the temple were countenanced and even considered necessary.

Abdul Razzak, a Turkish ambassador to the court of Vizianagar in the 15th century, described women of this class living in State-controlled institutions, the revenue from which went towards the upkeep of the police. A similar account of the State regulations concerning dancers at Golconda, is given by J. B. Tavernier.¹ A system of sacred prostitution and maintenance of dancing girls in temples was prevalent in many other countries, and especially those countries under Greek or Egyptian influence, and mainly in connection with the cults of Adonis, Venus, Attis and Osiris.

Among the folk-dances seen today in the Deccan, Kathakali is the one that has reached the highest degree of development; so much so, that the country's greatest exponents of classical dancing have shown a keen interest in it, even to the extent of themselves becoming masters of it, and presenting examples of it as part of their regular public performances.

It belongs to the category of religious dances, and is worthy of some detailed mention here, since this form of the art together with the Manipuri dances of Assam are undoubtedly far and away much above the level of all the other forms of folk-dance in this country.

The Kathakali type of dance is performed with

¹ "Travels in India", ed. V. Ball, London, (1889) i 157f.

variations in almost every part of the Deccan, but belongs most truly to Malabar. There has lately been a great revival of this highly developed folk-dance; and in its natural setting this choreographic drama is performed by itinerant troupes of dancers who are usually Brahmins and Amalavasis. These troupes are patronised, and their performances are sponsored by the rulers and rich landed families.

The theme of the dance depicts mostly events from the great religious epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. The meaning of the word Kathakali is "Story-dance", the story being told by wonderfully eloquent miming.

A troupe consists of about twelve actors, all men, the roles of women being played by boys. Musicians, singers and drummers form the orchestra which is composed of the percussion instruments, so important in giving the rhythmic patterns of the music, mainly the "Chenda", a big cylindrical drum, which is hung from the neck of the drummer and gives a shrill sound; the "Muddalam", a small drum which is played by the fingers with the help of the "Angulimukhatra" (thimble); the "Chengalam" (gongs); and "Elathalam", a pair of big cymbals : and these are supplied with melody by the strings and wind instruments.

A Kathakali dance performance is continued throughout a whole night. From sunset till about nine or ten o'clock the approaching performance is proclaimed for miles around by the incessant and hypnotic rhythms of the huge temple drum, after which the full orchestra begins its overture on a stage conventionally facing south, and lit with an enormous lamp holding perhaps as much as twenty seers of oil. After this overture the chorus begins, the wording of which is supposed to be in Sanskrit

lokas, but is often a mixture of Sanskrit and Malayalam; then the curtain, "Trishila", which is beautifully decorated, is removed. The dancers appear, and dance with the accompaniment of chorus and orchestra. The chorus is sung to invoke the gods and goddesses and after this invocation, known as "Totayam" follows the "Vandana Slogam" in praise of the gods.

Then the chief dancer enters the stage and begins the main theme, of which the motif is generally the depiction of the triumph of holy over evil. His first movements are a display of rhythmic eye movements "Notam Kalasam" followed by "Nila Padam", or the rhythmic movements of the eyes, hands, feet and the body as a harmonious whole. During this exposition of the main theme by the chief dancer, the singers and the musicians of the chorus and orchestra are given full scope to show their skill.

The dress and make-up of Kathakali dancers is very peculiar and most interesting. Often the dancers are masked, "Mudi"; or else use a great deal of paint on their faces in order to obliterate the natural expressions, and to impose the conventional countenances of the characters portrayed.

The basic costume of all the players consists of a simple long-sleeved tunic over which are worn the traditional accoutrements peculiar to each character; and by which the members of the audience can readily recognise their identities. For warriors and heroes, for example, there are various pieces of armour-breast-plates, shields, swords, quivers of arrows and all the other paraphernalia of war; and for kings and gods, elaborate and gorgeous ornaments; and so on, each type of character wearing the conventional trappings of his role. Every

player, of course, wears a talisman whereby malicious spirits are kept at bay; and a wealth of incidental adornment in the form of ear-rings, flower-garlands, head-dresses; and also the 'Keyur', extensions made of silver for the finger-nails. All these decorations are made in varying degrees of ornaments to correspond with the degree of nobility of the characters.

Even more important than the variations in the costume is the form of the facial make-up. This is put on according to strictly conventional canons and has become so highly stylised as to give immediate and full information regarding the whole character portrayed by the wearer; whether he be god, demon, king, *rishi* (sage) or warrior.

Actually there are four main classifications of the players' characters:

(1) *Full Satwa*—individuals renowned for their sanctity, and detachment from material interests.

(2) *Satwa Rajas*—holy kings, most of whom are accorded the rank of deity in the epic legends.

(3) *Rajas*—worldly rulers, or any other powerful but meanly ambitious men.

(4) *Tamas*—This class includes attendants and almost every other character of minor importance. For these four classes there are the following basic distinguishing facial make-ups; which carry on the ancient traditional form, and of which variations are rarely permissible.

1. *Full Satwa*—Red and yellow powder are applied to the face, and over these various white dots are super-imposed to encircle the eyes and eye-brows. The line of the eye-brows, and the eyes themselves are accentuated by the application

of 'Kajjwal' (collyrium). The whites of the eyes are touched with a seed which stains them bloodred; and the lips are also painted red. Various "Tilaka" (distinctive caste-marks on the forehead) denote Rishis, Brahmins and holy women.

2. *Satwa Rajas*—The face is coloured green with raised white lines made by means of ground rice. Such a line running from the chin and along the jaw towards the cheek denotes the noble and lofty-minded hero-gods such as Rama, Krishna, the Pandava brothers, etc.

3. *Rajas*—The forehead is painted with an upright blade-shaped "tilaka," known as 'katti' (knife). The nose is painted red and the upper lip is adorned with prominent moustaches of ground rice. On the forehead, close to the bridge of nose, are worn two prominent dots, also of ground rice. This make-up instantly classifies the wearer as a character of undaunted ruthlessness; e.g., Ravana, Kichaka, Hirnyakashipu, etc.

4. *Tamas*—There are three official types of costume and make-up used in this category, according to the dominant colour of which the status of the character is indicated.

(a) *White*—The main features of this are a fleecy upper garment and white head-dress with plenty of artificial white hair, meant for Hanuman, king of the monkey tribes, and faithful helper of Rama.

(b) *Red*—The face and beard, in addition to the garments are coloured red, while black is used on the chin, lips and round the eyes. This rather fearsome effect is heightened by the small pieces of paper that are sometimes pasted along the nose and cheeks. This make-up is used by those

who play the parts of Bali, Dushashan, Kalki, and Sugreeva.¹

(c) *Black*—A black upper garment is worn and strings of black beads. Kali, Kirata² and Mahadeva in the disguise of Kirata wear this dress. Mahadeva in the disguise of Kirata is distinguishable from the true Kirata by the emblem of the crescent moon which he wears in his hair. This emblem is always associated with Mahadeva.

In addition to the above make-ups there are many other ways of painting the face and body in order to depict serpents, birds, deformed persons, court-jesters, etc.

The "kireeta", (head-dress or crown) in Kathakali is an important clue to the identity of the character, and is of two kinds; the first being a tall conical cap with a circular disc or halo attached at the back. The size of the disc varies according to the high or low status of the person who is being portrayed, so that in spite of the similarity of the dress of the five Pandava brothers, they can each be separately identified, by the audience according to the difference in the sizes of their discs. The other kind of head-dress is simply the conical cap without the halo, and this is known as the "mudi". Various additions to this further help to distinguish different characters. False matted locks of hair (*jata*) made from dyed jute, signify a *rishi* or sage;

¹ *Bali*—King of chimpanzees in the *Ramayana*.
Dushashan—Younger brother of King Duryodhana in *Mahabharata*.

Kalki—One of the incarnations of the Creator.
Sugreeva—Brother of Bali.

² *Kali*—The last incarnation of the Creator.
Kirata—A demon.

a tuft of peacock feathers, Lord Krishna; while a smaller round white cap with silver tassels is reserved for the use of Hanumana (monkey-god).

Kuchipudi Dance—Kuchipudi or Kuchelapura is a village in Kistna district of Andhra, which is the birthplace of this particular folk-dance. About 500 years ago, its Brahmins made a singular contribution to the art of Indian dancing by bringing about a synthesis of the various folk varieties of Shivalila (activities of Lord Shiva) presented both in the form of 'nritya' and 'natya'. These dancers during the era of Vaishnavism enacted stories of the Bhagavat Puranam in their dance events and thus came to be known as Bhagavutulu. The art of Kuchipudi dance is essentially pre-Thyagaraja, not only in music but also in 'nritya', 'sabda', 'muktayi' and 'tirmanam'.

There is a legend prevalent as well as reference of the incident can be had from Machupalli Kaifiat that in A.D. 1502 a few Brahmin Bhagavutulus went to Vijaynagar. The then King Vira Narasimha Raya, on being informed of their excellence in dancing, invited them for a performance. In the play the dancers enacted the sufferings of the people due to the misrule of Sammeta Guruva Raju of Siddhavatam. The King was so influenced by the exquisite enactment that he took immediate steps to redress the wrongs.

South Indian inscriptions divulge out that there was another group of artistes, known as Nattuva Melas, among whom women played important roles. Their art was gradually deteriorating. So in order to preserve the pristine purity of the art Brahmana Melas were organised, which absolutely excluded the fairer sex. Later on Kuchipudi Bhagavata Mela came into existence.

With the downfall of the Vijayanagar empire the Bhagavutulu Brahmin artistes migrated to Tanjore and were patronised by Nayak kings, among whom Achyutappa Nayak was a great patron of the art of dancing. He granted Agraharam to innumerable artistes for propagating and encouraging this art. Melatur near Tanjore was the Agraharam presented. With the development of Kuchipudi art Bhamakalapam or, one person enacting several roles, came into vogue. This type of dancing later on spread up to Hyderabad.

Among the Kuchipudi dance numbers the important items are Parijatapaharana, wherein Sri Krishna is compelled to bring the celestial Parijata flower to his consort, Satyabhama, and Dasavatara, or ten incarnations of the God. The other important solo items are the Pattabhishekam, such as Ramapattabhishekam and the Prahladapattabhishekam. In these items the principal events leading to the deification of the various heroes of Hindu theology are presented in the form of interpretative dance.

Yakshagana or dance-dramas written in Telegu were enacted by the Brahmana Melas in Melatur and the surrounding villages. Yakshagana and Ottamtullal are the sources of Kathakali, which later on became a polished art. An open field, after the summer harvesting, is generally the scene for Yakshagana. The themes are from the scriptures and the dancers put on a dress akin to those of the Kathakali performers but with less complicated make-up. They sing their own compositions either during the intervals or at the end of important scenes.

Ottamtullal is generally known in Kerala

as Kathakali for the poor people. Ottamtullal is performed by a single artiste, and means 'jumping and running'. The solitary performer acts and sings a whole play all by himself with only a drummer and a bell ringer to accompany him.

Thirai Attam of Kerala, though colourful and religious, is a type of devil dance, for being fierce and grotesque. The type possesses tribal dance characteristic features. Annually the dance function is held in the premises of the village temple, and the expenses are borne from the subscriptions given by the inhabitants of the locality. Thirai dance is also one-man show, who goes on performing throughout the whole night. The function is usually held just after the harvest of the annual crop. It is considered that harvest and summer seasons are the signal for festivities and amusements every year as the country goes gay in those specific times.

The make-ups of the artistes are intricate. The face and chest are painted with designs of assorted colours of striking contrast. The Thirai dancer or Thirai-Kolam looks hideous and fierce with his strange make-ups and dress. The spectators believe that the performer is influenced by the spirit of the deity before whom he is dancing. The dancer begins the number with graceful curves swinging sensuously with fleeting limbs in perfect rhythm. The tempo of the dance is aggravated and strengthened by the beatings of Ghendas.

He puts on a big head-gear having skull marks with two ear covers, one on each side. Bare-bodied he decorates himself with bangles and necklaces, some designs, generally, the hood of a cobra is painted on his chest. A big halo

made of paper is tied at the back which comes down to his waist. A skirt, having oriental designs, and snakes painted on it is worn having a wide girth. The dancer wields a scimitar while dancing.

The devil-dance of Kerala is somewhat similar. The devil-dancer generally uses a bow and an arrow instead of a scimitar.

The dances of the Banjara women of the semi-nomadic type are colourful. Every Banjara woman is expected to dance. The dances are simple and pleasing to the eyes and are inspired by the movements associated with daily tasks of the yokel, harvesting, planting, sowing and so on. The costumes embroidered with glass beads and shining discs are picturesque and charming and a great deal of ornate jewellery is worn.

Kuravanji is a folk-dance of Tamilnad. The classical dance Bharata Natyam has sprung up from this particular type of folk-dance. The Kuratis are the performers of this dance and they belong to a hilly nomadic tribe. They earn their livelihood from fortune-telling and dancing. The dancers are pretty girls who wander all over the countryside and dance to please those who pay them a small sum.

Telangana is the treasure house of a folk-dance performed by married women. This dance is known as Bathkamma. It is performed with great feeling by the womenfolk. There is a legend behind this dance which runs as follows. There was a Rajput king who had a pampered daughter named Saijanbai. She could not perform her household duties. After her marriage she was rebuked by her mother-in-law and sent to her father's place. She came back to her father's house and spent the rest of her life there.

In several parts of South India it is felt that drought is a punishment for the sin of the village. Those who take part in the ritual of propitiation spend the previous day fasting and praying. Early next morning they take their bath and pay obeisance to God Varuna or Rain God. With the beat of drum played by the head priest the dance starts. The movements of the dance and the wordings of the songs rise in a crescendo to a pitch of frenzy. Just after the incantations and preliminary functions are over, the worshippers dance in a circular fashion vigorously being excited by loud beating of the drum. The head dancer finally swings his sword with dexterity and precision and splits a banana into two, as an offering to the Rain God. This is, probably, a substitute for an earlier animal sacrifice. The principal dancer then dances singly and then kneels down and prays to God for rain.

When the Moharrum procession is taken out the Muslims of Tanjore perform a realistic tiger and peacock dance with appropriate costumes and make-up.

In Trichinopoly is held a festival which continues during a whole fortnight every year, beginning on Kartigai day; and celebrated with much singing, dancing and dramatic representation of the old and popular theme, the eternal triumph of good over evil. In this case, the story, through which the moral is driven home, is the one of Kama and Shiva. Kama, the equivalent of Eros in the Hindu pantheon, is said to have been a continual source of disturbance to Shiva, the ascetic, in his contemplations; and in his rage, Shiva burnt up Kama with the fiery rays of his rarely-opened right eye. This third eye of Shiva is considered the

everlasting instrument in the destruction of evil. However, Shiva's wrath was dissipated by the ardent prayers of Kama's wife, Rati, and he was prevailed upon to restore the disintegrated Kama to his former state.

On the first day of this festive season, bonfires are lit, and all houses are illuminated with innumerable little oil lamps, but during the ensuing days the celebrants become divided into two factions and feeling runs high as to whether Kama was in actual fact burnt up or not. No one seems to know the origin of this strange uncertainty, but it provides a very lively opportunity for much argument, which not infrequently ends in physical combat, which puts an abrupt end to the dances with which the feast is officially celebrated.

An interesting custom in connection with the Kartigai celebrations is the collection of the half-burnt sticks from the bonfires. These are planted in vegetable gardens and are alleged to keep off all insect pests. It is also considered a good omen for the following harvest if the Kartigai bonfires are put out by rain.

Kuddakuttu, or the pot-dance is a popular commemoration of Krishna's victory over Banasura. It is a pastoral idyll danced in almost every corner of the Deccan, and is believed to be the original dance which Krishna himself composed at the time of his victory.

In Vizagapatam there is a class of strolling dancers and actors, the Bhagavantulas; who have a repertory of shows based on some of the oldest stories in the Hindu scriptures; but unfortunately, the treatment of these stories has become so degenerate that they are now nearly always somewhat crude and coarse burlesques on the lives of the

village notables, with the religious story running through as a hardly distinguishable broken thread in the composition of the dance drama. This form of entertainment is now so degenerate that respectable women would never be found among its audiences; and even the ordinary professional dancing girl, who is not normally so very chary of risking her reputation, very rarely performs with a troupe of Bhagavantulas.

The stories from the Puranas (scriptures) most frequently used as a basis for these farces are—

(a) The *Samudra-manthanam* or 'churning of the ocean'. This deals with an account of Vishnu's incarnating himself as a tortoise, in which form he could offer his back as an adequate support for the mountain that was to be used as an axle in the churning of the ocean of the world, in which the ambrosia and other supernatural gifts bestowed on mankind had been lost. According to the story, the jar containing the ambrosia was brought to the surface, but was grabbed by the demons, and a conflict between the gods and the demons was imminent when Vishnu assumed the form of a beauteous nymph, Jagan-mohini, who mockingly seduced the demon hordes with promises of delivering to them alone, the ambrosia. While the demons were being misled by this vision, the gods were able to reclaim the food of their immortality.

The rough audiences of the Bhagavantula players find the interest of this last incident in the story much enhanced when a local milk-woman is brought on to the stage. She is followed by one who represents the collector of the octroi duty, who roughly demands payment of the tax; (this tax is never-failing source of irritation to the peasant who wishes to bring his produce into an urban

area to sell) and she brazenly bargains with him, offering her embraces in lieu of the tax, for which offer he, of course, falls; but she is clever enough to outwit him and the audience is overjoyed at the downfall of one holding an office which signifies any amount of petty tyranny for them.

(b) *The Jalakrida*—the story of Krishna stealing the clothes of the bathing gopikas, the village maidens, with whom he disported himself in his pastoral, cowherd life on the banks of the Jumna.

(c) *Parijatam*—the story in which Krishna presents the Parijata, flower of Paradise, to one of his wives, thereby exciting the jealousy of the others.

As with the *Samudramanthanam*, these ancient stories are contorted out of all recognition by this band of burlesquing mimers, and the audience of poor village men, women and children is regaled to its heart's content with exaggerated portrayals of the discomfiture and humiliation of such local tyrants as the zamindar, the tax-collector and his agents; poor consolation to a section of the community for whom this sort of thing is the only way they have of expressing their hate of the oppression with which they are continually vexed.

The village audience rewards its entertainers with a feast provided by the headmen of the village, and with a small sum of money that is collected. The theatre is any green and open place near the village; but on special occasions, such as religious festivals and marriages a temporary shelter of thatch and bamboo poles may be erected.

This kind of rustic entertainment is not unknown in other parts of India too where a down-trodden village community, with an undeniable if somewhat uncharitable sense of humour, loves

to witness an exhibition of all the forms of degradation it could possibly wish to the unscrupulous overlords and money-lenders of an out-dated feudal system of agrarian government.

In Tanjore, girls often gather together to perform the *Kilattam Acchoponga*, a devotional dance in which they dance round a holy spot surmounted either by an idol or a votive lamp, a simple exposition of dance, following the same form as hundreds of other folk-dances wherein the dancers group themselves in a circle and move around with rhythmic steps, keeping the time in their dancing by the chanting of some hymn or lyric; and stressing the beats with the clapping of their hands, unless they are fortunate enough to get the services of a friendly drummer, who will also join in with a *dholak* (simple drum). According as to whether the dance be a harvest celebration, or devotional dance such as this one, the *Acchoponga*; the timing will be more or less joyous and the gestures will be a graceful expression, generally spontaneous, of the sentiments embodying the spirit of the dance; but the general form is common to a large number of dances.

In Malabar, though not unknown in other parts of the Deccan too, is the *Kummi* dance, following the same general lines of execution, the gestures signifying the reaping and harvesting of bountiful crops. Akin to *Kummi* and *Kolattam* is the *Kaikottikali* dance. The former two types are danced sometimes with sticks in hands. Such too are the dances of the Lambadi women, which consist of much posturing in time to a rather monotonous chant; and also those of the people of the Trichinopoly district, men and women, whose favourite diversion is the getting-up of dance

performances among themselves. Here the men and women dance in separate groups, and a party that begins at nightfall will rarely pall on the performers until the advent of another dawn.

Another example of this simplest of dance forms is often to be seen in Malabar where groups of girls dance in circle, one intoning the verse of a favourite song, and her companions all joining in the refrain; each performer taking it in turn to sing the solo intonation, and of this simple dance they never tire until their desire to express themselves in all shades of emotional experience through the medium of their always graceful movement, is stated.

The women of Malkanagiri and Nandapuram are very well versed in the art of folk-dancing; again mainly in the form of those dances of which the basic figure is the circle. They dance very lightly and daintily in a ring, hands on each others' shoulders, and there is no more picturesque sight than a group of these happy maidens; dressed almost exactly alike in their clean white *saris*, enlivened with borders of cerise or gay checks, which reach only half way between the knees and the ankles. They wear rings on their fingers and bells on their toes, like the lady in the Nursery Rhyme; their graceful limbs are tattooed with formal designs from the ankles to the knees, and from the wrists to the elbows the left fore-arm being almost entirely hidden under a score of jingling brass bangles; and their feet loaded with chased brass anklets of considerable weight.

Their simple orchestra, consisting solely of drums, beats out a gay tattoo while the girls group themselves into the preliminary circles; then the sound of the drums dropping to a muffled beat,

each circle strings out into a long line, headed by the leaders who carry a baton of peacock feathers, with which to indicate the movements of what develops into a rhythmic 'follow-the-leader'. Each long chain of girls dancing in perfect step, and stressing the time by the clinking of the anklets, moves along with the ease of a perfect natural grace. As they dance, the girls sing, in unison, a tuneful refrain in a minor key, ending on a sustained falling note, and weave themselves, into sinuous lines, curves, spirals, figures of eight, and back into lines again, never faltering, never missing the time; in and out like some brightly coloured snake, first slowly and decorously; then as the music of the drums quickens more and more, with more and more abandon and higher and higher steps until they can no more; and the gay and joyous chains break up amid peals of happy laughter.

In Malabar is a type of dance now rarely seen, and looked upon with a certain contempt, as it was performed by touring groups of dancing girls under the leadership of a Nattuvam; and in Malabar the public performances of dancing girls are not regarded as a correct form of entertainment. The dance performance was known as Mohini-attam, and as its name implies, dealt with Vaishnavite legends concerning the heavenly temptress, Mohini.

Most war dances are a survival of a savage past, and are only practised today by the members of a few aboriginal tribes. Only in a very few isolated parts of the world are they still used to stimulate the lust for war; and wherever they survive in India, they are very mild affairs indeed. Sometimes, one may come across members of the Bhil tribe indulging in one of these unwarlike

performances, at Dohad in the Bombay Presidency, with interested spectators peacefully watching a scene in which the weapons carried by the dancers, are the only clue pointing to distant and bloodthirsty past.

Other aboriginals priding themselves on their dancing skill are the Khonds and Savaras, but in comparison with the delightful movements of so many village dances, their efforts are at best little more than clumsy stampings in time, in some tribes the women standing in a bunch in the middle, while their men-folk hop round them in an irregular circle, jingling their anklets and shaking their arms.

The Gonds who belong to the hilly clans of northern Hyderabad have their "Dandaria" dance. Nearly for two weeks after Dussehra festival, bands of dancers dressed in their best exchange visits with other villages and are cordially welcomed by their hosts. The youths followed by the musicians are the first to come. They come at a fast pace. The old members of the tribe come last. They all dance together moving in anti-clockwise fashion holding sticks which they strike against one another to keep time. According to the Gonds this custom originated from the ancient hero, Dandaria, who was the most prominent ancestor of the five-brother clan. Since customs like these involve social contact between the villages in an atmosphere of festivity, they are a remarkable method of maintaining the solidarity of the tribe.

There is also a tribe in Hyderabad known as Siddi. The original home of the Siddis was Africa, from where their ancestors were brought as warriors by the Brahmin kings. In course of time they have been absorbed into the Indian social

life. Their dances depict the tribal warfare of their homeland in all its ferocity. Armed with shining swords and matchlocks and dressed in their exotic primitive costumes they dance with vigour and force. These dances are performed during marriages and other festive occasions.

In the Godavari district, shows of puppets and marionettes are greatly appreciated by the people of the countryside. While such performances do not strictly belong to a survey of folk-dancing, they are certainly indicative of the highly developed love of rhythm and movement in the hearts of the common people. Very often the puppets in these shows are concealed behind a sheet, and their shadows are made to dance on the screen thus formed, the shadows being projected on to the sheet by a crude kerosene oil-lamp at the back.

CHAPTER III

ASSAM AND MANIPUR

Lai Haroba--The most important dances of Assam are those extant in Manipur State. As a folk-art they are highly developed and have become wellknown to outside audiences on account of many Indian dancers having learnt the Manipuri technique and shown it in this country.

The Manipuri dance is vitally alive and every festival, whether it be religious or social, provides an occasion for dancing. Any bright moonlit night at any time of the year draws the young people out to dance their way from village to village, their numbers increasing as they move along.

The atmosphere of the dances is one of light-hearted freshness combined with a youthful energy which makes them a most charming and enjoyable spectacle even to the most critical and sophisticated of beholders.

The description about the origin of dancing in the mythology of Manipur is that from the rhythmic physical movements of the Creator, Sidaba (Immortal), who is regarded as the Great Guru, dancing took its birth. During the time of Leisemba (Creation) sprang up Grace and Beauty in the person of Leimaren (Mother Goddess), Great Guru's consort. The great Guru and Leimaren completed the creation. Later on lesser gods

and goddesses adapted the Creation dance to please the Great Guru and his consort during the worship of the Guru.

This is the origin of all Manipuri dances, though in later ages the dances are associated with particular religious episodes from mythology and are performed with their applications to various stories and themes as *Lai Haroba*, *Ras Leela*, *Khabak* (clapping), *Ishri Cholom* (song movement), *Pung Cholom* (*Mridanga* (drum) movement), *Augri Hangel* (dance by both young boys and girls during 'Holi' or 'Doljatra'), *Kukrekek* or *Thabal Songbi*, etc. (moonlight jumping).

According to *Leithak Leikharole* a Manipuri scripture, the traditional dance of Manipur is *Augri Hangel*. The origin of Manipuri dance in general is again found in that treatise in the following manner: The Great Guru had two sons, *Kuptreng* and *Sentreng*. The Guru announced to them that who could circumambulate the world first, would get the royal throne. The elder son left the place earlier and went towards the south. *Sentreng* alias *Pakhangba* too was out having seen that his brother had already started. *Leimaren Sidabi*, the Mother, advised him to go round the throne of the Great Guru only seven times. *Pakhangba* did the same and showed great respect to his father, who asked him whether or not the circumambulation had been completed. *Pakhangba* related what he did according to the advice of *Leimaren*. The Great Guru approved of it, because to go round the throne was to have a walk round about the world completed. To walk round about the Creator means to circumambulate the world. So the coveted throne passed into the hands of *Pakhangba* without much effort.

As soon as Pakhangba became king Kuptreng alias Sanamahi returned to his starting point at Lamdaipung after the completion of the long walk. When Sanamahi proceeded towards the abode of the Great Guru at a place called Kangla with the hope that he was sure of the throne the news of Pakhangba's success by taking a short course came into his ears. He was enraged and was prepared for a fight.

Pakhangba shuddered and helplessly approached the twelve nymphs created by the Great Guru, who promised him every sort of protection. The twelve goddesses then took the younger brother inside a circle formed by them by clasping each other's hands, so that the elder brother could not see the younger one and could not harm him. The goddesses then began to dance in a circular fashion. This dance form then was gradually handed down to mortals. Some Manipuri dancers believe that this form is the origin of Augri Hange type of Manipuri dance.

Sanamahi was indirectly warned through the chorus of these twelve muses : It runs as follows:

*"Kekrek Ket Mo Mo
Yangoi Syamba Syao Syao."*

*"Woe to traveller ! Your voice is harsh
Peace ! Peace ! Peace !"*

These taunting remarks added fuel to Sanamahi's fire of anger, and he thrust his great toe into the Earth for causing destruction. The Great Guru was aware of it and rushed out to pacify his son, proclaiming a mandate that the two brothers would rule over this country alternately each for twelve months in one turn. His further instruction was that one would be the potentate of

every household in company with Leimaren Sidabi, while the other would reign as the king of the country. They were advised to return to their respective places and not to come out before the Kaliyug.

We get another account of traditional Manipuri dancing, especially Rasa Lila dancing (dances of Krishna and Radha), from the Manipuri scriptures. The story, as has already been narrated earlier, is that Shiva with his consort Parvati was in charge of one of the gates of the *pandal* where Lord Krishna absorbed himself in the Rasa dancing. The melodious music punctuated by clattering sound of the bells was ringing into Parvati's ears, but its performance was not a matter to be into their sight. She became restless. Shiva held communion with Krishna and asked Him to allow Parvati to see it. The request was not granted, but Krishna had no objection to its being performed by Shiva at some other suitable place. The disappointed couple chose the spot which later on came to be known as Manipur.

Both Shiva and Parvati arrived at Koubru hills. They met with the Kirats, a certain hill tribe, and found the valley under water as the rivers Leimatok and Barak were blocked up owing to the heavy landslides from the hills. Then they proceeded towards the Nongmaying to scheme out a plan for draining out the water. They stayed there for some time and then left for the South.

A watercourse, called the Chingumghat, was made out right through the southern hills and the excessive water in the valley was let out. Still the valley was by no means free from dampness. Shiva found himself helpless and invoked Lord

Krishna who eventually came to his help. One fountain was filled up by Krishna and the place where the fountain was made is now called Vishnupur after another name of Krishna (Vishnu).

Ten divine beings accompanied Shiva. They were engaged in the works of drainage and in filling up the pits and at last they became regents of ten different quarters as given below: Haoga Suraren (East), Marjing (North), Wangbren (South), Kongba-Meiromba (East), Nongsaba (East), Khoriphaba (West), Irum-Ningthou (South-East), Thangjing (South-West), Chinghei-Nongthou (North-East), and Loiyalakpa (North-West).

The rivers Kongba, Iril, Nambul and Imphal worked as good drains. The last named river to which all the rivers of the valley are tributaries reaches the Chingunghat and embraces all the wild ravines of the south to fall in the Chindwin, a tributary of the Irrawaddy.

It was Kangla that became dry first. The Leimatak and the Barag cleared their ways in the meantime.

Shiva and His divine consort became elated at the sight of the promising state of land for their much coveted Ras. They, in conjunction with other divine beings, arranged to have it duly performed. Various musical instruments, such as lute, 'Pena', and drum, etc. were used and their song in rhapsodic verses was : "*Herilo Lila Herilo Haiyute, Khulaite Hoya He Asibu Thoinae Haraobh Leibani, Hou He Hou He Haya Negeda.*"

Ananta (serpent king) also joined them with his bright gem which lit day and night for seven days till the end of the dance. At this holy performance the joy of the divinities knew no bounds

and they showered blessings upon this land. "Let it be ever green and devoted to the Supreme Spirit" was the uniform utterance of all the Gods.

Since this Maha Ras performance the country became known as Manipur because of its being adorned with the gem of Ananta. Before it, Shiva Nagar was the name of Manipur. The mythical rulers of Manipur were the descendants of Ananta, the serpent king, to whom Shiva passed the royal throne and acted as minister under him.

After the Ananta dynasty a new age appeared in Manipur with the advent of the Gandharva king, Chitrabhanu. He had a daughter whose name was Chitrangada. With the characters of Hindu mythology we generally find that the names of the individuals signify their qualities which they are endowed with. Chitrangada was obviously an artist as her name signifies.

According to the *Mahabharata* once Arjuna was being exiled and during his pilgrimage he reached the Mahendru hills, and arrived at the city of Manipur during the reign of Chitrabhanu and there he married Chitrangada.

Arjuna was himself an artist *par excellence* and chose his lady mates among artistes. It is possible that Chitrangada knew the art of dancing, and if not, was taught by Arjuna.

We find testimony of his talents as a dancer in his travels and adventures. The *Mahabharata* says that once Arjuna went to the Heavens, and for his reception there was a grand musical festival, which was arranged by Chitrasena, the chief painter in Indra's court. Urvashi's dance in the programme was too much appreciated by Arjuna, and on seeing this, wrongly judging the situation, Indra sent Urvashi to Arjuna. But Arjuna, on

the other hand, acknowledged her as his Guru (teacher), because in his judgment she knew the art better than him. When Urvashi came to Arjuna, he addressed her as his mother and teacher, and did not comply to her immoral wishes.

At another place the *Mahabharata* speaks of Arjuna in the guise of a lady (Vrihannala) teaching the art of dancing to Uttara, daughter of Virata, the King of Matsya Desha.

Undoubtedly these are mythical stories, but these myths reveal that temperamentally the inhabitants of Manipur are dance-minded and place this noble art on a sacred altar. Most of the dances of Manipur again are religious. It should be remembered that religion and art, especially the dance art, in India are inseparable.

After the Rasa Lila dance the next in popular favour is the "Lai Haroba", (literally, "merry-making of the gods", it also loosely means "God's blessings"). Before the conversion of the people of this country to Hinduism they were animists, and as in Burma, the old religion still flourished side by side with the new, every family having its "Imung Lei" or household god, which has been incorporated into the Hindu pantheon to be worshipped whether under its own name or under a borrowed Hindu one. The hills and valleys abound in "Laiphams" or god's seats, which are the abodes of local deities and duly revered as such. The Lai Haroba dances are mostly a survival of the ancient ritual and are an annual ceremony in which each and every village seeks to propitiate its own particular Lai.

The dances are performed in the open space before the temple; and although the occasion is

one of religious solemnity it is nevertheless marked by a good deal of merry-making and fun.

The celebrations begin with a dance offering of fruit and flowers performed by gaily dressed girls who are led by the "Maibis", priestesses of the older religion. This having been performed the youths select dance partners from the girls for the ensuing entertainment.

Both Lai Haroba and Ras Lila are depictions in suitable dance movements, facial expressions and hand gestures the story of cosmic creation of the Universe as conceived by the Manipuris. The Lai Haroba technique has twelve parts, the first part is known as "Nandai Jogai". This art depicts the division into two of the entire blank space and atmosphere encircling round the Universe. In this particular item the hands are lifted vigorously upwards in such a fashion as to divide the sky into two parts and create something high above the Earth.

In "Leken" dance the waist is moved in a circular way to indicate the creation of a round world. The dancer occasionally stands on the toe of one of the legs in "Lenet" dance in order to convey the idea that the Universe does not rest on any solid object but is revolving on void space. In the "Leitei" performance the dancer with the help of suitable hand gestures tries to show that the void space is divided into many parts.

The following are the twelve divisions of Lai Haroba :

The very first performance is executed on the opening day. In it a male and a female worshipper invoke their souls to appear and take divine forms. The dance is known as "Leikoba".

The second item, which goes by the name of "Hailava", shows the exquisite joy of the Great Guru Sidaba at the time of starting the creation.

The third part is known as "Aman-Athou-Kofaya", and is an outburst of joy of the male and female worshippers after they see the divine forms resulting from their invocation of their souls.

In the fourth one the Great Guru sends a goddess to a place of danger at the time of creation. This part is an execution of the episode performed by the female worshipper or dancer.

The fifth part is performed by a group of female dancers. It deals with the glory of Sidaba's asking his *guru* to create the Universe and the latter refuses showing his inability to do and Sidaba gets angry.

The sixth item is generally male group dance which conveys the idea of attaching some special and concrete form to Sidaba's creation.

The seventh is a humorous dance. It deals with the pranks played and exchange of fun between gods and goddesses.

The eighth portion of Lai Haroba, "Herabo", is the most difficult performance. It is regarded as very strenuous and the dancers are mostly terrified to perform this part not because of the stylised technique and intricate movements of the body, hand gestures and rhythm, but the belief among the Manipuri dancers is that if there is any slip in any sphere while performing the item the curse of God falls not only on the performer but on the Earth. The item wrongly executed prophesies evil for both king and his subjects. The dance is performed in this particular division of Lai Haroba to celebrate the occasion of the endeavour of the Great Guru when he conceived the idea of creation.

In the ninth part, which is known as "Lebao", the grace and beauty of an anatomical dancing body has been described by suitable expressions, gestures and movements of the body.

"Phangarel", the tenth part, demonstrates man's family life. When he enters into his everyday life he requires "Phanga" (fire), so by means of fire man as social being is shown in this particular item.

"Ugri (history) Hanjen", the eleventh part narrates the history of mankind.

The twelfth and the finale of the Lai Haroba is known as "Leren Mathek" (zig zag way of a snake). Creation has been compared to the zig zag movement of a snake in this last item.

The entire execution containing the twelve parts of Lai Haroba takes fifteen days to perform.

The following are a few notable Karanas (body postures) of Lai Haroba: Loima Jagoi, Loitai Jagoi, Lenet Jagoi, Tekhen Jagoi, Moirang Jagoi, etc.

Augri Hangel is also another kind of Lai Haroba. It is performed as a popular folk-dance, as Kekrekek and Thabal Songbi, during the Doljatra, but the difficult and important portions of Augri Hangel are omitted by artistes because their activities are restricted by some superstitious beliefs and reasons.

In Manipur, nay in India, religion and dance are inseparable, as has been said before; every dancer is a Sadhak or worshipper of the dancing God. Before the Manipuris adapted Vaishnavism, Lai Haroba dance was the dominating one. It has been mentioned above that during the worship of the guardian deities, Thangjing, Marjing, Wangbaren, Koubru, etc. and the royal deity

Pakhangba, Lai Haroba is performed, and this has been handed down to the present day. This Lai Haroba is observed as a religious rite quite different from the Brahministic rite though it might have been a form of Hindu Tantra or has been originated from it.

Lai Haroba is danced either singly by a male or a female, or in duets, or can be performed in groups of males and females combined or males and females in separate groups. Sometimes in a duet Lai Haroba dance a male person sings at the pitch of his voice, and the couple dance with the accompaniment of the song of the boy.

The orchestra of Lai Haroba consists of a very big drum, bamboo flutes, big gongs, "Manjira" (small cymbals) and a 'Pena'. The last named is a sweet stringed instrument and is a speciality of Manipur. A round piece of leather is pasted on a round shaped dried half shell of a coconut and a bridge is fixed on the middle of the leather. There is a piece of bamboo or wood attached to the shell of the coconut having keys at the end like a violin. The strings are made of the hairs of a horse's tail attached at both ends. The instrument produces a 'Sarangi' like effect.

The Aharya or dress and decoration is purely of Manipuri design in arts and idea. The designs of the costumes have important reference to unavoidable mythological customs. The *sari* is one-piece cloth tied at the waist having rich golden stripes with a dark green background and a richly decorated border down below. There is a half-sleeved blouse of green satin and the head-dress is the most artistic one in Lai Haroba; which is a golden ribbon around thick green velvet like furs closely knitted. Long flowing hair comes down

and with the sway and sweep of the body it adds grace and beauty to the dancers. The female dancers put on gorgeous ornaments, necklaces, bangles and rings, but anklets are not used.

The male dancer's dress consists of a coloured silken *dhoti*, but no upper garment, the body being bare, but profusely ornamented with necklaces, armlets and rings. There is no head-dress and no anklets.

The dance begins with the slow movements of the hands and slow beating of the feet on the ground in accordance with the broad divisions of the time rhythm. Gradually the tempo rises finishing the performance with a bow (Namaskar) to the gods and the spectators, touching the head on the palms of the hands resting them on the ground.

The Lai Haroba technique afterwards received its field of propagation in the dance episodes of Khamba and Thoibi, a tale of the love of poor but noble youth for a princess, a story of which there are versions in the folk-lore of every land. The more expert dancers assume the lead, and they dance and execute the theme of the story.

The epic has three parts, "Loi Kum" (exile), "Loikab" (to come back), and the last part ending in a tragedy. The last part is never performed, because it ends in an unhappy finish. The Manipuris cherish a superstitious belief that if they stage the third part evil omen will befall on the kingdom.

Khamba belongs to the Moirang clan and the place, a few miles away from Imphal, where this clan lives, goes by the name of Moirang. The story starts with the death of Khamba's father and mother, a good and noble couple. Khamba's parents left their child under his maternal uncle

and a friend of Khamba's father. Naturally they did not take care of Khamba when he was a boy, but they used to show their love and affection towards the child when his father was alive and was in power. Though the neglected child could not get proper education in his boyhood, still he excelled others in strength, sports and games. Other youths of the same clan or of the neighbouring ones, not being able to defeat him in bouts, as usual, became his rivals and began to conspire against him.

Khamba in his youth took up the profession of a milkman and his work was in addition to the distribution of milk to do some household jobs in the houses of other chieftains. Accordingly, he had access to the palace of Chinghuba, who had a very handsome daughter in the name of Thoibi. Gradually Khamba and Thoibi fell in love with each other.

Khamba was very much loved for his valour, heroism and strength by the king of that place who was the lord of all the smaller chiefs. The king came to know of this secret love and asked Chinghuba to give his daughter in the hands of Khamba. Chinghuba could not disobey the orders of his master, but was marking time, as he was not in good terms with Khamba and did not like him. Chinghuba wanted to give his daughter in marriage to another young man, Chief Nongban of Angom clan. Nongban was Khamba's rival and opponent in every respect. Nongban has been depicted as a fool in the epic.

Chinghuba and Nongban several times arranged traps to put Khamba to death but failed. In one such attempt of theirs the king had to order Khamba to fight against a mad elephant. Khamba

killed that elephant and was badly injured. While he was unconscious and bedridden the king sent Thoibi to nurse him. During this time the love, secretly cherished in the hearts of the couple, got out to express their feelings and developed into deep-seated sentiments. Chinghuba had to send reluctantly his daughter, because he could not go against the wishes of the king. This is the end of the first part. The most famous and artistic dance in this part is the duet dance of Khamba and Thoibi before the temple of Shiva.

The second part begins with the coming of Thoibi to her father's place who rebukes her and strikes her with a club. She faints and pretends to be dead regaining her consciousness. She is then sent to exile and is given a club by Khamba for her protection. She goes to a chieftain of Burma and there resides with the company of his daughter, who illtreats her. But she is in good books of the chief. In the Moirang village the cattle and the crops are being destroyed by a man-eating tiger. Both Khamba and Nongban are sent by the king to kill the tiger. Nongban is badly injured and eventually dies. Khamba is successful in killing it. The king calls Thoibi and both Khamba and Thoibi are wedded.

The second part finishes here, which is popularly known as "Loikum Loikab" (sending to exile and calling back). The most famous dance in this part is Thoibi's solo performance in the court of the Burmese Chief.

In the last part after the marriage of Khamba and Thoibi they lead a peaceful and happy life. Khamba always is in high praise for his wife before his friends, who jokingly advised him to examine the fidelity of Thoibi. Khamba in a disguise went

to his wife and began to throw indecent gestures. Thoibi could not understand who he actually was and before Khamba could reveal his identity thrust a spear into his heart, as a result of which Khamba died. This part is never performed.

The divine love of Radha Krishna by and by culminated into Khamba and Thoibi in Manipur and the place is replete with the folk-lore and songs bearing this love episode. Parallel to this we have the immortal love story of Heer and Ranjha in the Punjab and every province in India has such stories in existence the characters of which have now become mythological and traditional ones and are now worshipped like heroes, gods and goddesses.

The inhabitants of Ngangkha Lawai, a village of Moirang, have still preserved the richly decorated silken dress of Khamba and Thoibi.

Manipuri Dance in Vaishnava Period

With the advent of Vaishnavism in Manipur both the technique and ideas or themes began to change gradually. The technique of Lai Haroba slowly became stylised and sophisticated. More rules and regulations in rhythm came in vogue. Radha Krishna episodes became more prominent casting aside the other themes. Khol took its place and was the only time-giving instrument. Intricacies in 'bols' began to spring up.

When Vaishnavism prevailed the most prevalent classical dances of Manipur became the following: Ras Lila, having its branches in Nartak, Basanta and Nritya; Goshtha Lila (Krishna's pranks as a cowherd boy with the Gopinis) and Lai Haroba. Lai Haroba even now goes side by side with Radha Krishna episodes which are

commonly known outside Manipur as "Manipuri" dances, being largely performed with the accompaniment of single 'Khol'.

In the latter half of the seventeenth century the Manipuri dance found the best field of its application in the Vaishnava cult of Shree Radha Krishna wherein the ideas of the Ras Lila being the most suitable medium for revealing the Manipuri arts of dancing to its highest standard of Angika, Vachika and Aharya. The inspiration of the Manipuri dance series is purely religious and the majority of them illustrate the romantic love of Radha and Krishna, and are entirely free from any suggestion of sensuality. The art in Rasa dance is devotional in movements, expressions and costumes. Here the Lasya is the dominating feature.

The history of Manipur tells us that during the reign of Bhagyachandra five Vaishnava missionaries came to Manipur from Bengal, viz., Ganga Narayana Chakravarty, Krishna Charan Chakravarty, Kunja Bihari, Nidhiram Acharya Thakur and Ram Gopal Vairagi. Through their initiation Manipuri dancing, which became then the outcome of Kirtan, took a firm foothold and the technique was much advanced.

History again narrates to us the king's excellence as a dancer on another occasion, when he was returning from the palace of the King of Assam to Manipur. He had to fly away from Manipur, when he was a prince, as there was a plot against his life. While coming back to test the affection of the Manipuris towards him, passing through the wild hill tracts and crossing over many streams, the fearless prince reached Khebuching, where he danced with a spear on a flat stone.

lying steep on a difficult slope, in order to know whether Providence would keep him to contend for the throne.

Every village in Manipur has a temple dedicated to Krishna-Radhika, Krishna-Balarama, Krishna-Chaitanya, and attached to the temple is a hall for the celebration in dance of episodes from the Krishna legends. The arena of the dance is called Rasa Mandal, having the space of a ring circle for at least forty persons. Decorated with flowers, the Gopinis make a circle during the performance and Radha and Krishna dance in the centre. The performance takes a period of about six hours beginning from 10 or 11 in the night.

The Manipuri dance received great ovation and royal welcome in the latter part of the eighteenth century from Maharajah Jai Singh (1759-798), who afterwards became popularly known by the name of Maharajah Bhagyachandra. One day Lord Krishna appeared before the Maharajah in dream and ordered him to instal an image of His and to perform Rasa dance for its commemoration. Furthermore, the king was informed that there was a jackfruit tree on the Bhasmukhagiri (Bhatri Giri) for the purpose.

He was further instructed that he should arrange for the proper execution of all the Bhangs (movements) of Rasa dancing in the Rasa performance on the occasion of the installation of the image. Krishna explained to him all the techniques of the Rasa dance. The techniques were later known as "Kaspan Cheidhei", "Basanta Rasa" and "Pan Cheidhei".

At daybreak the court astrologer, Lairikyengbam Ram Singh, was consulted by the king. The

astrologer pointed out the place which was on the Kaina Hill. The king himself went to this hill with his courtiers and began to search for the tree with the help of an old man of Angtha village. The tree was found on Friday, the third day of the month of "Poinu" in A.D. 1769 and was uprooted with great care. The pious king was much delighted and the family of the helper was permanently exempted from State duties for this great service.

The trunk of the tree was brought to the palace with great pomp. The lovely figure of the Lord which the king saw in his dream was described by him to the artisan, Sapa Lakshan, who took up the task. The image of Sri Govinda was completed and was placed in the royal palace.

After the proper installation of Sri Govinda the king became known as Maharajah Bhagyachandra. He and his daughter, Seiza Lairoibi, carried out the devotional services. Maha Rasa (Great Rasa Lila) was performed during its celebration on the 15th of Hiyangei in that year. Seiza Lairoibi, commonly known as Bimbayati or Bimananjuri, took the part of Radhika and became famous as Raseshwari. In the first Rasa Lila in the history of Manipur this princess played the role of Radhika.

The princess led a life like that of Mirabai and later on went to Navadvipa in Bengal. She erected the temple of Anuprabhu and spent her life there dedicating herself to God Krishna. She was offered in marriage to Shri Govinda by her father because she denied the earthly candidates and suitors, among whom figured a few neighbouring princes.

In Manipuri Jagoi (dance) there are five

major and important portions. The first is known as "Brindaban Pareng (Pala)", which is a description of Brindaban. This is performed both by males and females. The second portion is "Bhangi Pareng". This shows a particular system of movements of the body of a female, and in the third part, which is also termed as "Bhangi Pareng" the male body movements are shown. In the fourth, "Khurum Pareng", (Pranam Pala) the part of salutation by a female dancer is enacted, and in the fifth one, which is also "Khurum Pareng", the salutation by a male dancer is exhibited.

The following are some notable Karanas (body movements) of Manipuri dancing which are termed as Chalis; Champraokapi, Lashingkappi, Khujengloibi, Longloi, Upaloi, Bhangi, Chalimatek, Chali Aroibighat, etc.

It should be always remembered that in pure Manipuri dance neck movement, movement of breasts and hips are not permissible. These movements are regarded to be degradation in the art of dancing and are shameful. The belief of the dancers of Manipur is that they have been warned in treatises not to demonstrate these movements publicly.

There are many other kinds of dances prevalent in Manipur which are performed in social and religious functions. Some of them are Takhousaba (spear dance); this number depicts the art of both aggression and defence at the time of fight with spears; Thang Jagoi (sword dance), Chalam of Khubek Ishri, Nat Pala and Pung Chalam.

The orchestra of Manipuri dancing consists of Mridang or Khol, Manjira and flute. Sometimes the dance is also accompanied by a chorus of four to six lady singers. The band of Khol

players is known as "Dhumen", and they occasionally number from 15 to 40.

The costume of players, musicians and chorus girls is extremely beautiful and rich in colour. The female dancers wear a tight velvet bodice, the short sleeves of which are ornamented with a two-inch band of gold thread embroidery, an extravagantly full skirt which swings above the ankles in great graceful curves, and convolutions of its endless yards. This skirt is of green or dark red silk bordered round the hem with a wide band of sequins; and tiny round, oval and square pieces of coloured mirrors are sewn in scattered profusion over the whole stuff of this attractive garment.

A broad strip of white cloth is bound tightly about the waist to accentuate its fragile slimness above the wildly swirling folds of the skirt. Tucked into the waistband of the skirt and worn over it is a veil of the finest gauze-like material striped with bands of narrow silver ribbon. The sight of all this splendour is in itself a feast of beauty, particularly when in rhythmic movements, the silver and the sequins and the bits of mirror catch and reflect sparkling light in all directions.

The head-dress of the girl dancers consists of a small conical cap of velvet trimmed with a narrow band of pearls at the edge of having a spray of pearls hanging from the peak.

Krishna himself wears a yellow silk *dhotie* (a skirt-like garment worn by men), secured at the waist by a silk scarf with long tasselled ends. The upper part of the body is free from clothing; but plentifully adorned with necklaces, armlets and bangles. The head-dress is a richly jewelled crown surmounted by a tuft of peacock feathers, emblem of Krishna.

There is an examination board in Manipur consisting of twelve *gurus* or experts in Manipuri dancing having the Maharaja as its President. Unless and until a dancer is passed and acclaimed as a dancer by this board he is not regarded as an expert in Manipuri dancing in Manipur. In case any dancer invents some new technique or some new theme in Manipuri dancing that cannot be regarded as authentic unless and until the board approves of it. The dancer has to appear for an examination before this board, which on such occasions sits in the temple of Sri Govinda.

Rani and Thamble Sna were the most famous female dancers of Manipur in Lai Haroba and Manipuri dancing respectively. Now-a-days Vimala is the best dancer and Thamba Larghobi the best actress. The place among the female dancers of the last named artiste is second.

Another kind of dance, viz., "*Bakasura*", is a dance diversion among the boys of Manipur. It represents the story of Krishna killing a malevolent crane. The crane is made in an enormous size from white cloth over a wooden framework; its fierce disposition being indicated by wicked eyes made from bundles of cloth; and two long sharp wooden teeth. This structure is supported on the back and shoulders of one of the dancers; whose legs well laden with ingling anklets serve as the legs of the crane.

Bihu Dance of the Plains

The artistic Bihu is a dance of the plains performed throughout the length and breadth of Assam by both girls and boys on three occasions during the year, the most important being the Baisakh Bihu enacted in the first week of the Indian New Year.

Every ceremony is ritualistic and backed by some form or other of the mythological themes. Art and religion in rural life cannot be separated from each other.

The Gods enjoy intelligible delights, landscapes, music, dancing, offerings of flowers and fruits, those incredibly beautiful offerings made out of the simplest elements into the utmost elaboration. One will see them moving smoothly on the heads of women, winding over invisible paths above the tall green rice, and later forming high walled narrow streets in the temple, a festival of brilliant colour, the walls a mosaic of patterned offerings of great ingenuity and variety of design; golden-flowered aureoles towering above. There will be rice-cakes of various shapes and colours, thin round wafers, white and brown, dried snow white, compressed grains; sweetmeats, bananas green and yellow, oranges, and innumerable kinds of fruits.

On the "Bihu" day the Assamias get up early in the morning, take their bath in the river and put on new garments. They go from house to house, visiting superiors, friends and relatives. They pay respect by touching the feet of the elders, and bestow good wishes to others.

The cattle are anointed with a mixture of mustard oil and turmeric and then led to the nearest stream to be ceremonially bathed. They are tied with new ropes, and are garlanded with brinjals and pumpkins. While doing it the cow is blessed with the following words: "*Lau Kha, Bengena Kha, Basare Basare Barhi Ja, Mar Saru, Baper Saru, Tui Hobi Bara Bara Goru.*" (Eat pumpkin, eat brinjal, Be big year after year. Your mother is thin. So is your father. Thou wouldst be a sturdy cow.) The superiors are presented

with big hand-woven-embroidery-worked napkins called "*Gamosa*."

According to custom "Til Pithas", a kind of sweetmeats, must be cooked in every home. One kind of sweets is prepared by a mixture of "Bara Chaul" (a kind of special rice), Til and Gur. The mixture is rolled on a hot cauldron. Another kind of sweets is termed as "Ghila Pitha", which is a preparation of simple powdered rice and Gur fried with mustard oil.

The word "Bihu" originally "Bishu" takes its birth from the famous historic king Bishwa Singha. The three 'Bihus' are—Baisakh Bihu, Kartik Bihu and Magh Bihu. Baisakh Bihu begins from the last day of Chaitra and lasts for a week. It falls on the New Year's day and is a messenger of spring season, riches, mirth and revelry. Accordingly, it is known as "Rangali Bihu" or Bihu of happiness.

Kartik Bihu falls on the last day of Ashwin, and is known as "Kangali Bihu", conveying thereby the year's poverty, and the "Magh Bihu" on the last day of Paush, which is commonly termed as "Bhogali Bihu", meaning the time of abundance, wealth and enjoyment.

The day previous to the one on which "Bihu" falls is called "Uruka". The Baisakh Bihu is a festival observed in honour of the New Year with much singing ("Husari"), and dancing ("Nas") and the exchanging of gifts among friends. Songs in chorus are being sung in praise of Krishna and Hari. The most famous song is: "*Sri Krishner murate Bahul phul apahi nior pai mukali hayano oi Govindaye Ram.*" (On Ram and Govinda! The "Vakula" bud on the head of Sri Krishna blossomed with the falling of dew drops.)

During the Baisakh Bihu and the Magh Bihu the boys and girls organise dance parties in the fields, "Bihu Tali", and experience the usual freedom of being allowed to dance together. They sing and dance in accompaniment with drum, "Dhol", and "Panpa", a kind of buffalo-horn flute (Mahor Singhar). The most remarkable and rhythmic element in their performances is their clappings which is very pulsating and throbbing. Even Mahatma Gandhi was moved by their clappings and said a few words in appreciation when he visited the Sarania Hills at Gauhati.

In the night to watch these dances from a distance seems to be an unforgettable treat being soothed by the rows of lighted torches. On this spot, "Bihu Tali", thousands of people converge from far outlying districts, treading their ways over tortuous mountain passes weaving the paths of the dense forest, and sometimes hilly serpentine ways amidst the tea-plantations.

First a group of boys enter into the arena and with the movements of their palms welcome the new year and bid farewell to the old one. Then they make gestures of calling the boys and girls with their hands while dancing and request them to dance. Then separate circles of boys and girls are formed and they dance with their feet joined jumping side-ways. Both the hands are either placed on their waists, or heads or above the heads.

The songs of the peasants, "*Bara Doi Chila, Horu Doi Chila, Rangali Bihure batari dila,*" echo and the lonely corners of the valleys ring with the melody. (Bara Doi Chila and Horu Doi Chila are names of winds that blow during that season, akin to Kal Baisakhi of Bengal. These winds are the harbingers of "Rangali Bihu". The belief

among the Assamias is that a divine girl in the shape of wind comes to her mother's abode with great speed from her father-in-law's house in this particular season of the year.)

The folk-songs of Assam, especially the songs which are sung during Bihu dances, are very melodious and rich and beautiful in ideas. The songs are characterised by their rich poetic beauty. The very common song is —

*"Atikoi maramara mugare mohura
Tatokoi maramara mako
Tatokoi maramara Bahagar Bihuti
Napati kenekoi thako."*

"Our dear thing is bobbin (Mohura) of Muga. (Muga is a kind of Assamese silk. Mohura is a piece of wood in which thread is twined.) More dear is the Maku (the shuttle). The dearest to us is "Baisakh Bihu". Why should we not observe it? The word, "Bahagar" (Baisakh) is changed into Magh or Kartik when the occasion arises."

A very philosophic type of Bihu song is the following :

*"Sainosai bulibi bate of moina bat
Dehare mazote ase khala bama pisuli paribi tat."*

"Oh darling, while dancing (walking), first see carefully and then place your steps. There are many ups and downs in the midst of your body, you will slip and fall down there."

At the time of Magh Bihu buffalo fights are organised in the rice-fields, the contests being innocuous affairs as the animals very seldom inflict any injury on each other.

During the Magh Bihu this festivity of dance and music is organised in small huts ("Harali

Ghar") constructed on the river bank, and the huts are being burnt on the expiry of seven Bihu days.

In the Kartik Bihu a lamp, made of mustard oil in an earthen small plate with two cotton wicks placed across is lighted and kept under a "Tulsi" tree on courtyards. At the end "Prasad" is distributed consisting of "Mahchaul" (wet Kalai Dal and gram, salt and Ada).

I cannot refrain myself from quoting a few lines which are the usual verses sent to friends as message of goodwill and best wishes on this happy occasion in commemoration to the New Year and as congratulations during the "Bihu" celebrations.

*"Ketekire Til, Nahorore Ghila
Sajichho Bihure Pitha,
Tagarare chira, senehare doi,
Ku-u-ku matare mitha
Mone-paji-kota seleng chhokathi
Bukute patichhou kanhi
Bihure Bihuan aye tomaloi
Jai botahate bhahi."*

"Let my Bihu offering float in the air and reach your abode. This offering will consist of Til made out of Ketaki flower, Ghila Pitha of Nagakeshara flower, fried rice of Tagara (a kind of flower) and curd made of affection, mixed with the sweet songs of cuckoo. My remembrance will be loose cotton and the tools of weaving. The plate carrying is my heart."

The following is a popular Bihu folk-song:

Namaskar—(Invocation)

*"Prathame pronamo Brahmarupi Sanatana
Sarva avatarana karana Narayana*

*Toju nabhi kamalata Brahma bhaila jata
Juge jige avatara dhara asankhata."*

Song ("Husari")

*"Deutar paduleet gondhaise madhuri
Keteki malemolai oi Govindai Ram
Teteli talate tat bauti korilu
Pahori ahilu gusi oi Govindai Ram
Marar ghareloi jao toi pagali
Batat khope dieye dharim oi Govindai Ram
Batat khape dieye dhara toi pagala
Habit lare mari homam oi Govindai Ram
Habit lare mari homa toi pagali
Habit jwienaye dieye dharim oi Govindai Ram
Habit jwienaye dieye dharatoi pagala
Dhonare lagate urim oi Govindai Ram
Dhonare lagate ura toi pagali
Hakuti lagai ae anum oi Govindai Ram
Hakuti lagai ae anat oi pagala
Ture bar pukhurit parim oi Govindai Ram
Mure bar pukhurit paratoi pagali
Juluki baiye moi dharim oi Govindai Ram
Juluki baiye toi dhara toi pagala
Hamuke janame dharim oi Govindai Ram
Hamuke janame dhara toi pagali
Tuke sune puri khame oi Govindai Ram
Muke sune puri khawa toi pagala
Ture duyu gale dakim oi Govindai Ram
Kanrir koliya pakhi murolia
Kanrir koliya pakhi oi Govindai Ram
Jimane gai janu himane olai jai
Imanatey hamarihu. rati hol Govindai Ram."*

(Invocation)

"At the outset I bow before the divine being
Brahma. God Narayana is the source of all incar-

nation. From whose navel a lotus has shot up on
which Brahma is born. Innumerable incarna-
tions have taken place in this earth from time to
time."

(Song)

The words, "Govindai Ram", (Oh! Govinda!
Oh! Ram!) has been attached to every line.
Though it does not convey any meaning still it is
the burden of the song.

Both girls and boys—The courtyard of Deota
(the person in whose house the "Bihu" dance is
performed) is full of sweet fragrance of "Malati"
and "Ketaki" flowers.

Girls—I will fly away after preparing the
threads of the weaving machine under the tamarind
tree to my mother's house, because I am afraid of
getting blows from you (her husband).

Boys—When you will go to your mother's
house I will keep watch on the way and catch you
there.

Girls—When you will keep watch over my
path I will run away to the forest.

Boys—When you will run away to the forest I
will get the forest burnt and then catch you.

Girls—When you will get the forest burnt I
will fly up above the sky along with the smoke.

Boys—When you will fly up above the sky
along with the smoke I will catch you by means of
a pike.

Girls—When you will try to catch me by means
of a pike I will drown myself into your big pond.

Boys—When you will jump into my big pond
I will dive into it and catch hold of you.

Girls—When you will try to catch me by diving
into the water, I will assume the shape of a snail.

Boys—When you will be reborn as a snail I will burn you and make lime of the snail and then eat it.

Girls—If you eat me as lime I will cause your mouth to be burnt.

Both—Black wings of a crow ! Black wings of a crow ! As we go on making repartees our song will not finish. Let us make an end to it here because night is approaching.

Let me quote another poetic song :

*“Banarey marami oi
Rangat hale jale gatur marami
Rangat hale jale ga
Jatuke pahire hat bulalu
Jagat khan dukheray bhara oi marami
Rangat hale jale ga
Akahar tarare hakhti pati mur
Junake padami tara oi
Junake padami tara
Kenu lagise muke kina oi
Jagat khan dukheray bhara oi marami
Rangat hale jale ga.”*

The burden of the song is “*Rangat hale jale ga.*” Oh dear ones of the jungle ! (leaves, trees and animals) dance swaying your limbs with happiness. I have anointed my palms with the “*Mehdi*” (in the Uttar Pradesh) leaves. The world is full of misery. I have made friendship with the stars of the sky and also with the lotus of moonlit night. Dance in merriment swaying your body in happiness.”

Bhaona Dance

Very recently the fifth centenary of the saint of Assam, who preached Ahimsa in that land, was

performed at his birth-place, a small village in that province, by his admirers and devotees. A dance-drama in the form of “*Bhaona*” was evolved from the songs composed by him, which are a great contribution to Vaishnava literature. This dance-drama is being demonstrated by the villagers throughout the length and breadth of this part of our country, and speaks of their artistic talent, religious sentiments, simplicity and the purity of their thought unalloyed by any foreign influence.

The dance enacted in this particular kind of drama are purely religious. In order to tread on the path made by these religious dances we have to study in brief the history of these dramas which form their background.

There was a Vaishnavite saint and a preacher named Mahapurusha Shankar Deo, who was born in a village called Bordoa in Nowgong district in 1329 in the month of Ashwin, Shukla Dashami. He led a saintly life for 120 years having died in 1449. His father, Kusumbar Bhumian, and mother Satya Sandhya Devi, hailed from Mithila district in Bihar to Assam and died when Shankar was a mere child.

Shankar grew up a naughty boy as usual, but in his young age became a scholar, having learnt Sanskrit and the Shastras. His place was full of uneducated hilly tribes, who had imbibed all the vices, who were immoral and whose life was engaged in feuds among themselves. Shankar wanted to save them from this barbarous aboriginal activities, and to inculcate within them the nobler thoughts of life, the religious fervour and a yearning to crave for the supernatural force.

He went out for pilgrimage and travelled over many places, particularly Mithila. He went

as far as Mathura and Brindaban. In his sojourn he had learned discourses with scholars, philosophers and thinkers, and gained knowledge in Vaishnava religion. He came across Chaitanya and several others. He went back to his Province and began to preach Vaishnavite doctrine of Ahimsa.

Shankar Deo is worshipped now in Assam as a *guru* and a hero in the Namghars, which are halls, made out of a thatched roof resting on poles. In the evenings episodes of Krishna and Radha are sung by the Bhaktas (devotees). Most of the songs are composed either by Shankar or his disciples.

The songs are composed in Assamese and Brajaboli language. It is evident that Shankar was well versed in Assamese language, being born, brought up and educated in Assam, and he preferred to produce his compositions in the dialect of his land, because that was the only language by which he could transport his message to his countrymen, which they could follow properly.

But the question arises, why did he write other poems in Brajaboli language, which was a Sanskritised, stylised and refined dialect and which was foreign to the inhabitants of Assam.

Undoubtedly, Brajaboli language is a sweet dialect and is suited to depict a calm, tranquil and peaceful art far from a narration describing grotesqueness and horror. Even in one language there are different ways of expressing themes, words and styles are chosen to narrate morbid subjects, and sweet words are selected for giving vent to themes which are subject to certain particular flavour and sentiment.

Shankar took this dialect as his medium of expression for twofold purposes. Firstly, to narrate the sweet episodes of Lord Krishna in a sweet

language proper to convey the ideas, and secondly, that the episodes centred round a place where this language was prevalent.

Now, these compositions of Shankar are these plays sung in Namghars every evening in the Assam valley. Dramas are enacted having a particular theme or an episode from Lord Krishna's activities, his plays with the Gopinis or his mischievous pranks. In the dramas dances are exhibited. So it can be unhesitatingly inferred that the dances play a secondary part, the songs being the primary element.

There is no special season or restriction of time in Bhaona performance. It is performed throughout the year, during night as well as during the day. Bhaona is akin to Jatras of Bengal and is a mixture of sentiments or Bhava, Bhangi or gestures and Geeta (songs).

The orchestra includes a number of 'Khol's, minimum being four and the maximum number is 60. As a rule odd number of Khol's must not be used. There are also pairs of big cymbals (Bhon Tals).

The technique of Bhaona performance differs in respective Satras, which are religious institutions headed by a Bhakta, direct descendant of a disciple of Shankar Deo. There are four main such Satras, Aoniyati, Dakshinpat, Garmuriya and Karnabahi.

The place where the drama was enacted is usually a village green, an open air platform made of mud. But now-a-days they are often performed under *pandals* or in Dangar Namghars (big Namghars). The dramas are enacted in closed *pandals* or Dangar Namghars due to excessive rains. The round platform is generally

constructed at the middle and the audience squat on the floor in a circle around the stage.

But these days the platform is also raised on one side in a rectangular fashion and the auditorium faces stage as we have in the present sophisticated performances. The green room is a temporary enclosure made of cloth erected for that purpose a few paces away from the stage. The players walk from the green room before the audience, ascend on the dais and then act.

The lights are very peculiar in this performance. A plantain tree is cut into three or four pieces and they are made hollow having a hole on one side of each piece. The other side is left untouched. Then mustard oil is poured into it and two long wicks made of cotton are placed inside the hole. Such lights are placed around the stage and are known as "Bhota".

Lights are also made of big flat earthen plates in which mustard oil is poured and two wicks are placed crosswise, one of them is lighted.

Torches are also used. A wooden plank with holes in a semi-circular or angular fashion is hung up on two poles, and torches, with cotton soaked up with mustard oil, are lighted and fixed up in those holes. This is known as 'Agnigarh' (wall of fire). There is no light for the auditorium.

The aristocracy in the village is invited by the party of Bhaona. The aristocrats and prominent personages are known by the terms, Baroatui, Haruatui, Gaonbura, Gohain, (Goswami), Barogayan, Harugayan and Mendhi.

A few members of the party take a utensil, a bowl on a stand having betel-nuts (tambul) and betel (pan) placed in it and that presentation is taken to the rich people. This is regarded as

invitation to witness a Bhaona performance. The betel or betel-nuts are not cut. Two betels are placed, one on the other with a twig of straw inserted into a pair of betel-leaves.

The seats in the auditorium are arranged in accordance with the degree of aristocracy, which is judged by the number of plough one possesses. The common public receives information a few days prior to the staging of the play when the rehearsals are being carried on. The information spreads from mouth to mouth.

Bhaonas are performed sometimes continually for several days. Usually the performances which are held in the night begin from 9 or 10 p.m., after the villagers take their meals. They watch the performance for the whole night. Sometimes even twelve dramas are enacted and they are known as Borokheliya Bhaona.

The parties belonging to one Satra enact a performance, either one village or several villages take part to perform one drama, but all the villages must belong to one particular Satra. There are differences in technique in different Satras performing the same play. Actors are exchanged from other parties belonging to the same Satra, but it is not permissible from different Satras.

Recently the Bhaona technique in dancing has been developed to a great extent by artistes of Satras and they gave a performance in a sitting of the Indian National Congress which was highly appreciated.

The play begins with the entrance of a prominent person of the locality, Gohain or Barogayan, on the stage; who stands up and narrates the "Iti-britta" or the history of Bhaona in a song called

"Malita". He does not speak of the play which is going to be enacted presently.

Thereafter Dhyamali begins, which is playing on 'Khols'. There are two parts in Dhyamali, one which is played first is known as Horudhyamali (small Dhyamali), and the other which follows is called Borodhyamali (big Dhyamali). Now-a-days a few Satras have introduced a third Dhyamali in between the two, known as Mazudhyamali or the middle Dhyamali. Each Dhyamali is marked by a pause during which both the players and the singers take rest.

There is a chorus of Kirtan singers. Then occurs a Ghat (Sangat in the Uttar Pradesh) between the singers—Gayan—and the players on 'Khols, and cymbals—Bayan—before every Dhyamali.

The first Dhyamali begins with slow beats, the tempo then rises and is enlivened ending into a finale and a climax. This is done in every Dhyamali.

The player in the first stage jumps while playing, takes his instrument above the head and towards his sides with instantaneous jerky movements. Sometimes one side of the 'Khol' is played by both the hands. The body of the instrument or the middle part of it is also occasionally struck with the fingers in order to keep time.

The song is known as "Ghosha", which is sung both during Dhyamalis as well as during the play. Pathetic songs are called "Vilap". They are sung on occasions like the death of Abhimanyu (Arjuna's son) and so on. Many songs are composed in 'Payar' metre. Some are called "Khama prarthana". The song dealing with Brahma's asking for pardon from Arjuna is sung in Khama prarthana.

After the Dhyamalis the Sutradhar, who is the choreographer and director, enters into the stage and gives a synopsis of the entire drama by means of singing and dancing. The position of a Sutradhar in Bhaona is very important and his role is never changed. Once a Sutradhar is always a Sutradhar. He teaches his art to a few of his party and after his death the best among his pupils steps into his shoes.

If he falls ill or any unavoidable circumstance happens a Sutradhar belonging to the same Satra is called for in his place. Two persons hold a piece of sheet of cloth and the Sutradhar remains inside the sheet. When he is brought at the middle of the stage, those two persons who lead him on to the stage make their exit with the piece of the cloth.

The Sutradhar then crossing his arms at the chest and moving his palms welcoming the audience makes a round and dances and then comes at the middle of the stage, sits down, bends low and bows down with folded hands (Namaskar) before the audience. Then he says, "Today we will enact this drama (Rasa Lila, Kamsa-Vadha, etc., as the case may be), and please pardon us for any mistakes."

Sutradhar's songs and dances are the same in every play, simply the change consists in mentioning the title of the drama and its gist. He will have to sing and dance Vishnu's Aradhana (invocation of God Vishnu) and Dashavatara (ten incarnations of God) to start with in every drama and then the gist of the drama which is going to be enacted will follow.

Sutradhar is always present, either standing at one of the sides of the stage or coming at the middle, explaining the gestures, giving links to

the songs and narrating the whole theme. No females take part in Bhaona, the female roles are played by males, and all of them dance.

The dress of Sutradhar consists of a 'Ghuri' (Ghagra), a 'Chaddar' or a piece of cloth crossed at chest hung up from both the shoulders and tied at the waist, a full-sleeved tight fitting single (*bundi*), tied at the sides by strings, and a turban. Sometimes the turban is a silken one. A garland of "Tulsi" leaves around the turban is essential in the dress of a Sutradhar. The colour of his dress is white.

A peculiar kind of anklets is worn by Sutradhar as well as other dancers, which is termed "Nupurs". There are round thin iron or brass wires and inside these wires there are round metal pieces, but Ghungru is now-a-days coming into vogue.

The Dhyamalis play the part of warning bells of the modern dramatic performances, and the Sutradhar's demonstration is the overture. Then Krishna is brought on the stage in the same fashion by two persons as Sutradhar is brought in. His technique of dancing is the same in all the plays. His number is more symbolical. But the dances of other characters are not so symbolic. The dancers try to express by means of gestures what is being sung.

The colour of Krishna is made blue, and he puts on a yellow *dhotie* ("Pitambara"). There is no hard and fast rule and regulation about dress and make-up as we have in Kathakali dancing.

There was a particular paste of colour extracted from a kind of tree and prepared out of certain barks, leaves and flowers. That paste was known as "Hengul Hightali". From this paste

different shades of colour, particularly blue, yellow and red, were produced and these colours were specially used for making up the actors.

Mask is sometimes used to depict characters of Rakshasas, Danavas, Asuras, birds, serpents, Bakasura, Garuda, and so on. These masks are made of mud well burnt, painted and shaped by a class of people known as Khanikars, whose profession is manufacturing indigenous masks and of images of Krishna and Radha, which are being worshipped either privately or in temples. The mask dances in Bhaona are called "Satryia" dances.

To introduce humour a few clowns are also brought in as is done in circus. The dramas end both in tragedy and comedy. The Bhaona finishes invariably by all the Satras with a song known as "Koilkharman", by the Gayans, which expresses that they have finished this particular Bhaona of Shankar Deo. In Bhaona the dances are of Bhakti Rasa, embodied with the sentiments of devotion.

The drama is prompted by religious exuberance and there is no atmosphere of competition among the parties of the same Satra or among different Satras or villages. Prizes are awarded by audience. A party belonging to one village will not go to perform in another village, because in that way the villagers of that village where another party may come to perform think that they are incapable of executing a Bhaona.

A drama "Kaliyadamana" composed by Shankar Deo is never performed by any Satra. There is a belief among the Satras that once Kaliyadamana was being enacted. When Krishna was dancing on a thousand-hooded serpent demon called Kaliya, the serpent which was made of leaves, paper and wood, became lively, dragged

Krishna to the nearest river and storm and rain fell on the earth bringing calamity and destruction on the world. The boy playing the role of Lord Krishna lost his life thereby.

The Aoniati and Dakhinpat Satras, especially Aoniati, does not observe original and pure Bhaona. Bengali Jatra has greatly influenced Aoniati, specially its songs. The Bhaona troupe takes donations and subscriptions (Borongni) from the villagers to meet the expenses of the performance.

A new form of dance technique has been evolved from Bhaona which is a sophisticated type of dancing, known as "Kamrupi" dance. Assam used to be known by the name of "Kamrup" in olden days. Probably this nomenclature was attributed to give a provincial touch to the technique, because it had its birth from Assam. There is a district even now in the State by that name. The famous "Kamrupi" dances are "Phalguni", "Gita", "Karnarjuna", etc.

"Phalguni" depicts the story of how Arjuna, another name of Phalguni, was invited by the Gods in heaven to slay the demons. He went there and found it difficult to overcome them. Eventually he took help of the "Pashupati" arrow which was presented to him by Shiva and thus became successful. Gita dance executes the theme that Arjuna is unwilling to fight against his relations in the battle of Kurukshetra. Krishna, who acts as his charioteer, takes him aside from the battlefield and divulges out His power as the Supreme God, and teaches him the doctrine of Karma whereby he preaches that Arjuna is the means and is not the actual killer. Thereafter Arjuna joins in the fight and expresses from his movements that he is the means employed by God. Karnar-

juna is a duet dance showing the fight between the two heroes of the *Mahabharata*.

Other dances of the plains

Chhinna Jatra—Before Bhaona type of dramas came into existence there was another kind of Jatra which was called Chhinna Jatra. The Bhaona replaced Chhinna Jatra. It had no codified rules and regulations like Bhaona. The dance had no link, there was abrupt beginning and abrupt finish. It was full of Shringar Rasa, amorous and erotic. The main idea at the back of Chhinna Jatra was to give enjoyment to the spectators and the religious aspect was absent.

Natua—The Natua dance took its birth in Dairgaon and Hazu. It is performed by professional dancers known as Natuas. The name originates from Natas—dancers. The dance is performed with the accompaniment of 'Khol' Dhol (big drums) and a pair of small cymbals. The dance is characterised by big jumps, and it is not martial in character. There are many **Khols**—maximum number being ten—placed at the back of the dancer. He strikes at one of them and gives a high leap, strikes the other and then gives another jump. In this way he strikes at the Khols and then jumps for a number of times and then the actual dance commences. There are many Khol players who play in unison.

The Natua dancer paints his face like a clown, puts on a tight-fitting upper garment, has a crown and is profusely ornamented:

Natua type of dance was formerly included in Bhaona by Shankar Deo, but Madhava Deo, one of the disciples of Shankar Deo, saw that the dance had gradually become vulgar and of disrepute,

and was full of leaps and bounds and at times became obscene. Accordingly, he excluded Natua dance from the purely religious Bhaonas.

Ojapali—With the accompaniment of 'Khanjani' (pair of small cymbals) the Oja with the help of two Palis or assistants sing and dance showing suitable gestures and symbolic effects. Oja, while singing, does not dance. The Pallis follow the song and play Khanjani and also make the broad rhythmic steps then the Oja dances. The Palis sometimes sing, "*Hey Ram ! Hey Hari*" ("Oh Ram ! Oh Hari !") Oja puts on the dress of Sutradhars.

Gorgonya Nachani—Before the reign of the British in Assam there was a place in Shibsagar called Gorgaon. There were female dancers who were called Gorgonya Nachani. Even now some of their descendants are in existence in the same place. Their dance is Lasya and amorous. The dancers themselves sing first and then dance. Sometimes they were taken by the Ahome kings, and they used to dance in their courts. Most probably they were the court dancers of the Ahome kings.

In this type of dancing the body is moved in all the directions and the head is bent slowly and at regular intervals. Arms are slightly waved and taken upwards and sideways, the palms moving all the time. The gestures express the meanings of the songs.

I cannot check myself from noting a pathetic song which is very common, and which is sung by the dancers, and they also dance with the accompaniment of this song:

*"Dholare sewate oi nachune nuthe oi
Ulahat nase ga*

*Keteki saraye oi binaoye erili oi
Panite napare san (more bandhoi)
Horini kotenu kandey
Jurirey paraloï harini nahe oi
Panitey napare san (more bandhoi)
Namgharar mojiat nasaniir nabajey nupur
Koliyar panpatey birahey nupur
Namgharar mojiat dhup dhuna najaley
Namorey nahuna ba (more bandhoi)."*

"The spirit of dancing is not coming with the beating of the drum nor the body moves with happiness. Oh ! Ketaki ! (a kind of bird) You have also forgotten to sing. Oh my darling ! Nobody's shadow falls on the water. Somewhere the female deer is weeping. No deer comes on the river bank. Oh darling ! Nobody's shadow falls on the water. The anklets of the dancer does not ring on the floor of the temple. There is the melancholy tune of separation even in Krishna's flute. No incense burns on the floor of the temple. Oh darling ! The sound of the incantation is not being heard from the temple."

Dergonya Nachani—In the present days there are many female dancers in a village called Deragon in Jorahat. Their technique is sometimes akin to that of Bihu dances. But the items are very obscene.

Nati Hazus—Hazu is a place near Nalbari in Kamrup district. There is a temple there which goes by the name of "Hazar Haya Griva Mandir". There are in existence Natis or female dancers like Devadasis kept by the temple. Such Devadasis are also in existence and are financed by the Kamakhya temple at Gauhati. These Devadasis have no other profession except dancing in these temples and they are supported by the temple

funds, and also the adjoining villagers help them by giving alms in grains. On ceremonial occasions these dancers dance in the open space meant for their performance in front of the temples. Their dance is purely religious devoid of all amour but Lasya. They observe celibacy and are never married. Once a Devadasi is married, she will not be allowed to dance in the temple and must have to leave the locality.

Deodhani dance—This wild type of dance took its birth from two places of Assam, Mangal and Uttarlakhimpur. It is performed during "Manasa Pujah" (worship of the Snake God). It is performed only by women. Deo means God and Dhani is a synonym for women. The term signifies the dance of a woman when she is overtaken by an evil spirit. The dance is furious and hideous. It is sometimes known as "Bhawani Charai" (influence of Bhawanimai on women in the Uttar Pradesh). While the dance is performed a goat is sacrificed before the Serpent God and a pigeon is torn by the neck before the deity. An Oja sings followed by two Pallis, but quite different from Ojapali dance and technique in singing. They do not dance here. The song is also not composed by Shankar Deo. The song which is sung by Ojapali in Deodhani dance is known as Shuknamni. It is purely religious describing the praises of Manasa Devi (Serpent God).

The inhabitants of Sylhet who are very fond of entertainment by dancing, have organised a system whereby the villagers may hire the services of a young Ghatu (boy dancer) to come to their homes and dance before themselves and their friends during an evening.

The villagers of the Surma valley, being also

very fond of the dance, have a delightful form of canoe-racing during which the time is set for the paddlers by one whose duty it is to stand in the middle of the boat, dancing to the accompaniment of his own voice and a pair of cymbals which he strikes himself.

A very difficult performance and one requiring long practice until a safe degree of proficiency can be attained is the "Kukri", or knife dance. During the years of training, young Kukri dancers are equipped with bottles until they are capable of handling real knives. These are fastened by cords to the ends of a pole, and as the dancer gyrates he swings the pole in wild patterns about his body, nimbly timing the movements of his arms and the swayings of his shoulders to avoid the path of the rapidly coursing weapons.

Nongkrem Dance

Many well-to-do people residing on the plains scorched by the intensive heat, run to Shillong, the summer capital of Assam, to cool themselves for a while, many tourists visit the place and persons of different parts of our country and also innumerable tea and timber tycoons have constructed dwelling abodes there; some go there on official work and others observe it as a health resort, but a very limited few take care to know about the hilly tribes scattered round.

Mostly Khasis, with their peculiar beliefs, customs, rituals, manners and modes of enjoyment abound in the district. Here I do not take into consideration the Anglicised and the so-called civilised Khasis of the town—thanks to the zeal of the missionaries—but I speak of those simple and sturdy Khasi folks of the moun-

tains, who are animists, and who live with their gods, goats and fowls to be sacrificed, with their fetish conceptions and with whom dancing is a part of their religious life. In order to be away from the humdrum, pomp and show of the city life for a while one has not to take much trouble and to traverse a long distance, because these Khasis live not more than ten miles away from Shillong.

You go to the suburbs during the time of their annual Puja which is being held for five days sometimes from May to July you will hear the sound of the incessant beat of the Khasi drums, echoing and re-echoing from the steep mountains, the plaintive sound of the Tangmouri, and you will see groups of children, boys and girls, ascending the hills attired in their best colourful clothes, and Khasi stalwart villagers driving herds of goats and flocks of fowls to the temple of their clan, Sunam Sanad.

On the fourth day the Khasis dance, every young virgin will dance as a rule and every Khasi yokel is a dancer and takes his chance of dancing in the ring in front of the priestess's house. It is a lovable sight to witness the warlike movements of the young folks dancing in a circle and in the ring the girls with their heads bent slithering slowly.

One of the greatest dance festivals of the Khasi hills is the "Nongkrem". An account of the dance remains incomplete if the Khasi religious custom and the ceremonial rite, during which this particular dance is performed is not explained.

Nongkrem is the name of a hilly spot where the royal family of the Khasis reside. The place is about eleven miles from Shillong. The royal

family has assumed the name of its clan from the name of the place. The dance is performed at a place called Smit in Nongkrem. Smit is the seat of the Nongkrem Chief. Previously the dance performance used to be held at Shillong, but when the British occupied it and made their summer resort the Nongkrem clan had to shift from there. The religious ceremony of which the dance is a part, used to be held at a place in Shillong known as Burra Bazar.

At first there was only one royal family of the Nongkrem, but in the beginning of the eighteenth century, the family split up into two divisions, one began to reside at Nongkrem, and the other which came to be known as Mylliam royal family chose Mawlai, a hilly spot, ten miles from Shillong along Shillong-Sylhet Road, for their residence. The Mylliam family does not now observe the ritual rites and religious ceremonies of the Nongkrem, at this particular occasion, but holds the dance performance every year at Mawlai. Mylliam Nongkrem dance has, accordingly, lost its ritual character, and has degenerated into one exciting enjoyment and fun.

Matriarchal system prevails in the Nongkrem family, and the eldest daughter in the family occupies the exalted position of the Priestess or the Siem Sad of Nongkrem. At present the Chief's eldest sister is the Priestess and her daughter the Princess. A building has been assigned to the State Priestess (Sad Sunam) where she lives and worships the gods of the tribe, and prays for God's help and assistance in the maintenance of the Siem clan, for the good administration of the State and for the welfare of the subjects.

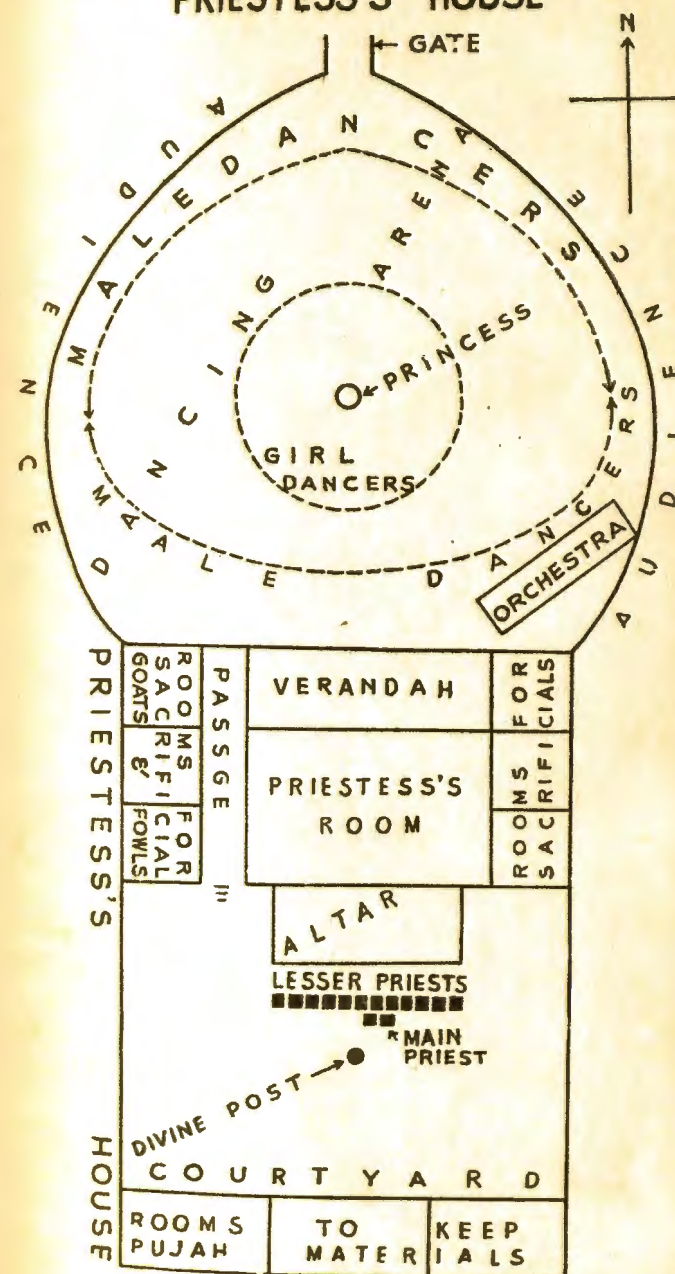
There is a big room at the centre of the building which is meant for the Priestess. At its back,

towards the south, is a big courtyard, on the middle of which there is the Divine Post, known as "Kishot Blei" (Post of God). There are small rooms in a row on the south of the courtyard in which the Puja materials are stored. On either side of the courtyard and the Priestess's room there are small rooms in which sacrificial goats and fowls are preserved. There is a big and spacious verandah facing the north of the building where the Priestess accompanied by the members of the royal family sits down and enjoys the dance performance which is held on the oval-shaped open field in front of the verandah. Inside the building towards the north of the courtyard behind the Priestess's room there is an altar, where the Puja is held and from the altar there is a passage leading to the dance arena through which the Princess and the unmarried girls of the royal family come out and dance.

The annual Puja of the Khasis and their biggest festival of the year usually falls between May and July and continues for five days. During the month of the "Bazar days", i.e., the "Pamtiah Bazar" (Chhota Bazar—Small Bazar) the Khasis get an indication of their annual festival. The Priestess, the main priest and twelve lesser priests worship the Gods of the Khasi clan for five days throughout the whole day and night with the accompaniment of drums and flutes. The Puja is performed with a prayer in thanksgiving to the Creator, the Almighty may shower prosperity to the State and to the royal family.

The date of the commencement of the Puja is fixed by the Soh Blei (Soh means holding and Blei means God. Hence Soh Blei is the holder of the God or the main priest). On the northern wall of the altar a wooden board is hung up on

NONGKREM DANCE ARENA AND PRIESTESS'S HOUSE



a nail, which has a flat handle and the handle has a hole. A kind of auspicious red mud is kept in the hole. The Sohblei comes on a day, which is always fixed up by custom, i. e., the "Pamtiah Day", and which is nearly three months before the Puja days, and besmears the red mud taking it from the hole of the wooden board on a fowl's egg, and breaks the egg on the board with a small hammer kept for that purpose. Then he makes astronomical calculations from the moon and the egg shells and fixes up the date. It is called divination by egg-breaking. It is believed that a favourable and an auspicious day is obtained from egg shells.

The ruling chief is then informed of the date by Sohblei. The chief then sends a kind of ring sloop ("Kyrwoh") by means of messengers to his "Raids" (sub-divisions of the State ruled by officers akin to magistrates). The ring sloop acts as indication of the date of the annual Puja. The Raid-Chiefs, then on their turn, send the date to their headmen of villages, who have professional "Dhulias" or drum-players, who by means of beat of drums announce the date to the people. The subjects keep goats and fowls to be sacrificed before the altar and throughout the whole year they take vows that in case there be no epidemic in the village or no death or disease befalling on the family or there be plenty of rain and crops they would sacrifice so many goats or fowls. And after the animals are being sacrificed in one year, they again begin to keep animals to be sacrificed in the next year. On the Puja day they drive their flock of goats and fowls to the Priestess's house and wait for the hour of their turn.

On the first day of the Puja the Sohblei

begins to pour wine (made of rice, a kind of white fermented beer, known as "Umjyudem") on the altar and the sacrifice of fowls ("Lang Iewdah") goes on without a stop. The Sohblei examined from the entrails of the fowls whether the coming year would be a year full of famine and a bad year or a year of prosperity. As long as he does not get good signs from his examination of the entrails of the fowls the pouring of wine on the altar is continued by him and the Priestess. Incantation of hymns are done by the main priest and the Priestess during the whole night, and during the day twelve lesser priests perform Puja. One deity is assigned to one lesser priest, so they worship twelve deities, one each.

The lesser priests sit in one row facing the north. On the sacrificial day, i.e., on the third day, in which day the principal goat is being sacrificed by the ruling Chief, the main priest performs Puja during the whole day also along with the twelve lesser priests. He sits at the middle and worships the two deities, who are propitiated by two lesser priests sitting at the middle, i.e., the sixth lesser priest from the left and the sixth from the right.

The result of the examination of the entrails is being informed to the Chief from time to time. Fowls are being sacrificed one after the other, and worship and pouring of wine continues unless a good result is achieved. On the third day the first goat is being sacrificed by the ruling Chief, and on the fourth day goat sacrifices by the subjects commences. On the first two days only fowls are sacrificed and on the three successive days both fowls and goats are sacrificed. Both the main priest and the Priestess pour wine on the altar.

A number of "Dhulias" (drummers) sometimes 50 to 60 play throughout the whole day and night in turns during the Puja to show that the ceremony is going on. In all 27 tunes are played by them. On the fourth day of the ceremony Nong-krem dance is performed from early in the morning till late in the evening. The main priest and Priestess observe fast on this day. The dance is performed to please the God.

Early in the morning the Princess accompanied by the unmarried girls of the royal family lead the procession from the altar through the passage and comes on the open green where dancing is held. A few girls hold an umbrella over the Princess's head and all the girls dance. After the arrival of the Princess and the unmarried girls of the royal family at the arena the unmarried Khasi girls of the State join them and all the virgins dance. They are richly attired and ornamented. The girls look down with their hands hanging stiff on both sides and slowly slither forward and backward. They are surrounded by male dancers who dance in a circle a martial type of dancing. They are in two groups forming two semi-circles advancing forward and receding when half of the circle is complete. When the two men at the tail face each other they make a rightabout turn and then finish the semi-circle.

This is reminiscent of the Khasi war dance. The men brandish naked swords ("Waitlam") in their right hands and have shields in their left hands. Sometimes instead of swords they waive "Chamars" ("Symphiah") made of camel's hair. They jump and there is virility in their performance. Now the original martial movements have degenerated and have become a bit vulgar when the

males cut jokes with the girls dancing inside the circle. The male dancers shout, "Why are you looking down, look up at us."

The dance movements do not depict attack; they show that the warriors are adopting defensive attitude. The idea of this performance is that the tribe is ready to protect their womenfolk, property and jewels from the hands of the invaders or other hilly tribes. For this reason the girls put on their best attire. As a rule the girl dancers should be unmarried but there is no restriction about the males, they may be both unmarried and married.

The ornaments which the Khasi girls put on are well designed and patterned and are mostly made of gold. Every girl puts on a crown ("Pansugiat"), earrings, ("Lyngkyneng") and necklace either of gold or pearls or corals ("Kpieng"), armlets ("Syngkha" or "Mahu"). The necklaces used by them are many and of various designs, some are of red-beads, and others are made of corals with golden balls hanging. Silver and gold chains bedeck their necks and shoulder ornaments ("Tad-Tyrepeng") their shoulders. There is a closely fitted neck ornament "Chik" (in Bengali) "Shan-Ryngang" (in Khasi). The other ornaments used by the female dancers are golden chains ("Kynjri-Tabah"), bracelets ("Khadu") and rings ("Sati").

The hair of the girls are well tied at the back of their heads (Bengali "Khonpa") with a gold tassel ("Sai-Khyllong"). They do not use nose-rings.

The female dancers wear a very costly piece of silk cloth round the waist up to the ankles ("Pienkhor"), the price of this cloth before the War was estimated to be about Rs. 1,000 per

piece, a velvet full-sleeved jacket, and a piece of silken cloth is hung up from one side of the shoulders ("Kyrshah-Dhara"). The jacket is mostly of brown and black colour. The two pieces of silken cloth are mostly brown and yellow in colour, but the common practice is that they use variegated colours and they prefer such use. They also use a sort of under-garment ("Nohta Sor").

The male dancers put on neck ornaments ("Chik") some kinds of necklaces, shoulder ornaments and ear-rings as the girls use. They put on a turban ("Jingspong") with a plume ("Thuia"), mainly of yellow-red colour. There is a sling hung from the shoulder on the left side to put arrows, and those are actually being put sometimes. They put on a belt either of gold or silver and at the back of that belt there is again a plume.

The male dancers wear a sleeveless coat, of either velvet or "Banat", which is generally of dark colour with gold embroidery and a "Dhotie" of the same "Dhara" as the girls use.

At this particular occasion both male and the female dancers put on very costly silken dress, the minimum price of one piece being about Rs. 1,000. A special class of weavers, known by the name of "Salkuchi" of Sylhet, weave this dress both of Khasi male and female dancers of this occasion, and no other weavers are allowed to prepare them not even the Khasis themselves. The cotton cloth is woven at the Khasi hills but not this particular dress. The Salkuchis are preparing this dress for the Khasi dancers from time immemorial, but Khasi mythology says that in ancient times this dress was manufactured in Tibet and Burma for them but gradually the Salkuchis monopolised it, and it goes against the tenets of their religion if the

dress is being produced by any other caste. The dress prepared by the Salkuchis are not used by the Assamese.

There were seventy tunes prevalent among the Khasis, but now the musicians remember only twenty-seven tunes and all of them are played during the Puja ceremony. The tune which is played at the time of dancing is known as "Sing Masteih". The orchestra people are known as "Dhulias" (drummers) because the drummers play a prominent part. Big drums ("Nakra" or "Bom") are played at the time of dancing, and not at the time of the Puja. Generally one big drum is played and two musicians play the "Tangmouri" (somewhat akin to Assamese "Panpa" (flute). Tangmouri sounds like bagpipe). "Padia" or a pair of cymbals is also used and a kind of tom-tom, known as "Ksing" is also played. "Ksing" is made out of earth and is struck with sticks.

At one corner of the dancing arena a raised platform made of earth is constructed for the orchestra which occupies its place assigned to it when the Princess appears on the open green. The audience either sits or stands up on the open space around the field.

Dances of Nagas and other Hill Tribes

The Naga hill tribes of Assam have a rich repertory of dances, mostly war-like in character, and which they perform in ceremonial dress to the accompaniment of traditional tribal chants. These chants, though associated by ancient tradition with the occasion on which they are sung, could never be explained by the singers as they are mostly in an archaic tongue not understood by any but a few elders of the tribe.

Naga warriors in ceremonial dress are a really imposing sight. They dance in the fullwar-paint of successful head-hunters, and each year during their spring-festival celebrations they emerge in all their ritual splendour, carrying on the left arm a plaited basket decorated with bison horns, which is supposed to contain trophies of the hunt in the form of the heads of their slain enemies, and in the left hand the spear with which their victims are killed. A number of brass ornaments hanging across the chest keeps tally of the warrior's successful expeditions after heads; while his well-carved ornaments are evidences that he is not entirely indifferent to the arts of peace as well. In fact, some sections of the Naga community are most highly-skilled craftsmen and their ornaments of silver, brass and iron are often very finely chased in many pleasing designs. In full dress, the Naga adorns himself with many of these trinkets,—necklaces of stone or horn, shining brass armlets and elaborately decorated brass head-dresses; in addition to the grim symbols of his hereditary calling. During one phase of the head-hunting dance, the Konyak Nagas hurl their spears in faithful representation of the actual method used to deprive their unwary victims of their skulls.

It is an interesting fact that spear-throwing seems to be the only known form of sport among these primitive inhabitants of the Assam mountain jungles.

As the festival time approaches, the little boys of a Naga village enter with great enthusiasm into the preparations for these great dance celebrations. They spend long hours copying the dress of their elders and adapting to this end all sorts of odd materials that come their way. Part of their

costume consists of the cane leg shields, plaited for them by older brothers and in careful imitation of the big hunters, they paint each other's faces with chalk and generally indulge in keen competition to outdo one another in the grandeur of their dress, and their prowess in the dance.

To the slender Naga maidens, liberally adorned with bead necklaces, brass bangles and amulets, falls the duty and privilege of dancing before the Chief's house. Here they sway hand in hand, apparently tirelessly, for hours on end, grouped on a platform of bamboos erected for this purpose.

Not all the dances of the Nagas are celebrations of the hunt, and some sects have a series of dances which are performed by the young men and girls of the community, which are very graceful in form and movement, and are accompanied by the singing of charming and simple melodies.

The Nagas mostly inhabit on the hills surrounding Manipur and the Naga dance is peculiar in Manipur. Among the Nagas the Kabuis are akin to the people of the plains in their manners, customs, sports and forms of merry-making. The Kabui dance is very colourful and is performed by young folk, both girls and boys. The boys dance holding big Naga "Daos" (knives) during the performance, while the girls dance decorating themselves with ornaments of their tribal peculiarities.

The Kabuis dance with the accompaniment of a big drum which is the prominent instrument and which gives a regular and broad beating of time. The dance is generally performed during winter. The villagers, men, women and children, surround the dancers in the open yard of the village.

Some elderly people (males) sometimes have spears and waive them up and down when they

sing at intervals. After the performance the performers enjoy themselves in drinking beer and eating rice and well-cooked ham.

Every hilly tribe has a special kind of dance. The Bhutia girls dance in a slow rhythm. They put on very gorgeous and colourful dress at the time of their dance performance. The dance of the Dufflas is performed both by girls and boys in a circle with slow steps. There are dances of Abbars, Miris, Mikirs and Jaintias. The Thumba Jumba hilly dance is prevalent in Manipur.

The Miri dance is very interesting and much like the Santhal dance. A bevy of girls dance in alternate batches to the music of drums played by men. They also sing sometimes, and the girls dance with the accompaniment of the songs.

These aboriginal denizens of the mountains, together with the Manipuris are extremely superstitious; and practically all their ritual has as its ultimate object the placation of the innumerable spirits of the stream and jungle; all of whom are malevolent in varying degrees, and likely to work avenging mischief on the devotee who becomes at all lax in his gifts and attentions.

Dances of the Lushais—

The Lushais inhabiting the borderlands between Assam and Burma and the north-east frontier tracts, have their "dance de divertissements", which they perform during their religious festivals, marriages and death ceremonies. The devil dances are enacted mainly when there is a death in the tribe and especially when a chief or a member of the royal family passes away. They are also done to drive away epidemics or to please their gods during earthquakes, bad harvest and floods.

As regards ceremonies on death, a considerable difference exists in different tribes. Some burn their dead and others dispose of the dead by burial. The grave is dug to a depth of four or five feet, and at the bottom on one side, in such a way that the body lies at right-angles to the main grave, is dug a hole sufficiently long to hold a coffin. In this niche the corpse, fastened down in the coffin, a rough box made of planks and sometimes of bamboos tied together, is placed and the grave filled in with stones and earth. The head of the corpse faces west and the feet east. Over the grave poles are erected, and to them are fastened the heads of the animals slaughtered for the funeral feast. All spirits whether they have committed good or bad actions in this world, are received in the "village of the dead", but this proviso is made; should a person during lifetime have injured anyone or committed murder, his or her victim will meet the spirit on the road, and stop the path. A fight will then ensue, by which the spirit is purified, and then permitted to pass. The person injured by the deceased may, of course, be still living, in which case a spirit is appointed by the gods as a substitute. It is owing to this that dead persons are buried with their weapons of war, to be ready for the fray.

There are certain ways by which a spirit can avoid having to fight persons he has injured in this life; one being by peace-offerings of pigs, goats, birds, etc. For this reason it is customary to place the heads of animals over graves. On meeting the injured spirit, one of the goats or pigs, as the case may be, accompanying the deceased in a ghostly form, is offered, and if accepted, the fight does not take place.

After the burial of the dead there is a feast of the village people. The food consists of drink, meat and rice. On these occasions large quantities of liquor are consumed. The common drink is distilled from rice, and when new, is very intoxicating, gradually becoming less and less powerful the longer it is kept. In colour it somewhat resembles dark brandy.

After the feast in connection with a funeral ceremony is over the Lushais will indulge themselves in the devil dances. They wear hideous masks made of coloured bamboo pieces and leaves. The white colour is generally made of pounded rice. Now-a-days the mask is made of burnt clay as well and sometimes of papier mache by Anglicised Lushai. The German hues are applied these days. On the forehead of the main mask there are small skulls made. The sockets of the eyes of the main mask are generally left hollow but sometimes glass pieces are fixed. The ears and neck are covered with napkins, but now the dancers use thin papers for the ears and give them a fan-like shape. They are also of variegated colours. The body is covered with pieces of colourful rags with bold white paints suggesting the arms and ribs of that of a skeleton.

The dancers dance with wild jumps and occasional yells. Music is supplied by a species of reed instrument, and time kept to the striking of bamboos on the ground. Generally males only take part in these dances.

There are other kinds of ceremonies on death. When such dances are performed, and it is interesting to note a few of them. On the death of a man his spirit is believed to remain one full moon in the house he occupied when living, at the lapse of that

time departing to a village termed "the village of the dead", where it stays until returned to earth (at the lapse of an uncertain number of years) in the body of a new born child. Good and bad men go to the same village, but people carried off by tigers or killed by accident or in war, though still going there, live apart from the others. The gods do not inhabit the "village of the dead". All "mithun" (wild bulls), fowls, goats and birds, killed on the death of a man, accompany him on a future state.

On the death of a Lushai all the relatives and friends are assembled. The day after the death a large pile of crossed pieces of wood is raised in the jungle outside the village, and on this the body is placed and more wood added. The nearest male bachelor relative of the deceased then stands on one side of the pyre, and sets light to it. As it burns he throws across small pieces of bamboo stems filled with water, calling out at the same time in the following terms: "Be as jungle; return to jungle". At the conclusion of the cremation, any bones left are collected, and, with the cooking utensils of the deceased are placed in a miniature hut built on the spot. The friends and the relatives then return to the village, hold a feast and then dance. The morning following an offering is made to the gods.

The Lushais dance the devil dance during the funeral ceremony of the chieftain, a strange and more or less disgusting custom which used to exist among a few sub-tribes, the Jansens and their co-tribe and the Tadois. Immediately on their death becoming known, the whole community, and any relatives and friends living in other villages, are assembled, and wild bulls, goats, fowls, pigs and

other birds are slaughtered for a feast. Each funeral guest, if not a relative, is expected to give one cloth for the use of the corpse; if a relative, two, three, or more.

In these cloths the dead body is carefully wrapped, and at the end of a few days, sometimes at the lapse of a day, it is carried out and placed on a raised platform at a distance of 30 or 40 yards from the house. Here it is decomposed. At the end of every three days the female relatives are obliged to visit the platform, or "machan", and so fasten up the cloths (as decomposition sets in and is progressing) that none of the putrid matter falls to the ground. During the whole of this period general feasting and dancing is kept up at the expense of the deceased chief, and only ceases when the supply of liquor runs short, or the corpse is thoroughly decomposed, and nothing is left but the skeleton. The bones and cloths are then carefully gathered, and buried in front of the house, but the skull is reserved for further ceremonies. It is first bleached in the sun, any loose teeth being re-fastened in the gum, and then, being thoroughly cleaned, it is placed in a woven cane basket. Another feast and dance is now held, at the conclusion of which this basket is carefully hidden away by the relatives.

The Zemi tribe lives in the North Cachar Hills. Though bearing the general appellation of Naga, the Zemis are distinct from the former. Mainly animists with agriculture as their chief occupation, they have a vast repertory of folk-dances, of which the "Khamba Lim" and the "Nruira Lim" are the most popular.

"Khamba Lim" is performed at the beginning of the harvest season by both males and females.

The males dance in a row opposite to the row of the females. The dancers though change their position in the course of the dance never break their rows.

"Nruira Lim" or the cock-fight dance is performed by a few boys and girls, who stand opposite each other and stage a mock fight. This dance exhibits the happy sentiments and has no particular significance.

There are other types of dances prevalent among the Lushais which are not grotesque and hideous in nature. They are not mask dances and are generally performed by males during marriage ceremonies and religious festivals. They are amusing and entertaining.

In the crossed bamboo dance two men holding the ends of bamboos in each hand sit facing one another. Two others then place themselves so that the bamboos which they hold in the same way cross at right-angles those held by the others. The two sets of men then alternately bring their bamboos sharply together, and as quickly back again to their original position on either side of their body. By this means a number of squares are formed and reformed. A youth then advances, and is expected to spring in and out of the squares, without being struck by the bamboos, keeping time to the music, which gradually grows faster and faster. The bamboos are brought backwards and forwards to the same tune, and the dancer has to be very quick indeed to avoid being caught in one or other of the squares, to say nothing of the unpleasantness of being struck with the bamboos on the shin.

A few words about the Lushai marriage rites during which the crossed bamboo dance is

performed will not be out of place and will be a bit amusing. A suitor having presented himself, his courage and perseverance are tested in the following manner. A leg of pork is hung up inside a house, and all the female inhabitants of the village are assembled, each armed with a strip of cloth, to the end of which is fastened a bag of stones. These women, of all ages, from the girl of seven to the venerable hag of eighty summers, then place themselves round about the house in such a way that anyone attempting to approach must pass by them.

The would-be wooer is now told to try and take away the piece of meat hanging inside. On a given signal, he makes a rush, which the women endeavour to frustrate by striking him with the slings in their hands. Should he succeed in his object, he is again mercilessly treated on re-appearing from the house, and is chased through the village out into the jungle. If the piece of meat is dropped the beating ceases and the man is loudly laughed at, and told that he is not good enough for the girl, and had better return from where he came. Should he succeed in getting clear of the village, his companions, whom he has brought for the purpose, quietly take possession of the girl, and remove her unmolested.

The tiger dance, which is a popular one, is generally performed during religious festivals and 'pujas', when the entrances to all the Lushai villages are closed, and no outsider is allowed to enter. On ordinary festivals the village is open to all.

The Lushais believe in three principal gods—Lambra, Golarai and Dudukal. Lambra is the head god or creator, and without his consent, nothing can be done by the others. Golarai is the

god of death. Dudukal causes sickness occasionally, but more often works for the good of mankind. When this latter god has to cause death, he carries out the decree through his wife Fapite.

Devil dance is performed to propitiate Golarai and Dudukal and Tiger dance for Lambra god. In this enactment a cloth done up to represent a pig or a goat is placed on the ground, and one of the youths of the village proceeds to imitate a tiger stalking it. The attitudes assumed are most amusing, and it is wonderful how some of the men, while on all fours, spring over the imaginary goat and alight on the other side.



Dance of the Abor Hill Tribes, NEFA

Jadur Dance of Bhoomiyas, Orissa





Jadur Dance of Oraons, Behar



Lambadi Dance of Hyderabad, Andhra

Churaha Dance of Chamba, Himachal Pradesh



Dance of Korku People of Bombay





Dance of Sacrifice

This dance is performed by two Naga youths at the time of sacrifice while worshipping the presiding deity



Maria Dance, Madhya Pradesh

Sheila Dance of Vindhya Pradesh



Dance of Bodo Nagas of Assam





Athanga Ras Dance of Saurashtra



Nati Dance of Kulu, Punjab



Dandia Ras of Gujarat



Thali Dance of Jaunsar Bawars



Bhil Dance of Rajasthan



Ghumar, Garba Dance of Rajasthan

CHAPTER IV

BIHAR AND ORISSA

The States of Bihar and Orissa, though not so great in area as most of the others, are extremely rich in the number of dance forms that have taken root and flourished there. As Malabar has given to the country the magnificent Kathakali dances, and Assam the delightful dances of Manipur; so Orissa too has contributed one famous type of dance to our rich and varied collection. This is the *Chow Dance*, a series of dances performed each year in the month of Chaitra (April) during the Spring festival in Seraikala. The dance festival proper is preceded by a three-day puja (religious rite) in the temple of Shiva; and this commences on a day deemed by the *pundit* as one auspicious for the ruler.

The *puja* ceremonies are primarily intended to call down divine blessings on the ruler himself and his realm. The *puja* ceremonies are performed by thirteen *bhaktas* (devotees) representative of widely differing castes from the Brahmin down to the very *untouchable*. These *bhaktas* are chosen to form the procession in which the flag is borne from the city temple to another, also under the protection of Shiva situated on the river bank outside the city. A pitcher, blessed by the officiating Brahmin priests is also carried in the procession, in order that water from the sacred banks of the river may be brought back to the main temple.

Following the procession, another pitcher of

water is brought from the temple on the river bank by one who, dressed as a woman, dances all the way. The pitcher he brings has been unearthed after having lain buried for a whole year in the soil of the river bank within the temple precincts. The local belief is that if the water in this pitcher does not fill it to the brim still, or is not clear, the coming year is to be a difficult one. The water in this sacred vessel, known as the *Jatra Ghat*, is afterwards used in the rites connected with the worship of Shiva, and the new pitcher of water, having been consecrated in the town temple, is then taken back to the river temple by the same procession of *bhaktas*, led by the flag of Seraikala, and is buried in place of the one that has just been dug up.

The tradition and purity of this sacred rite and the ensuing dance festival has been handed down from time immemorial and guarded with a most jealous integrity. This ceremony is repeated on each of the three nights of the *puja*, and after this the regular Chow dances begin.

The word 'chow' means simply 'mask'; and the traditional exponents of this dance adhere with the sternest rigidity to every detail relating to its traditional performance. Seraikala is also topographically so situated that outside influences have had no easy access. This is a fact of great importance, as the neighbouring places, Mayurbhanj and Nilgiri, were not able to maintain their dances of this type in their pure form; and have now altogether dispensed with the use of masks; and with all that was characteristic of the *chow* dances.

The annual festival in Shiva's honour also coincides with the New Year of this place, and on this occasion the gates of the old Maharaja's

palace are thrown open to admit the dancers; for whose art it has been extremely fortunate that the rulers had always shown a keen interest in it. The members of the royal household were not only the patrons, but also took an active part in the performance of the Chow dances; of which the themes represent every mood and aspect of cosmic creation, as described in the heroic legends of the Hindu pantheon.

Women never take part in this performance; female roles being played by boys chosen for the beauty of their voices; for they also sing in the chorus which accompanies the dance, besides being themselves dancers.

The training of the dancers for these performances is begun at the tender age of five years, when little boys are collected together under the tutelage of their elders; and taught the stories of the basic legends, along with the actual pantomimic gestures of the dance, by which the stories are to be interpreted.

Each year, although the groups of dancers perform together as well as separately, there is tense rivalry between the various groups; each striving to outdo the others by sheer excellency of its performance. At the end of the festival, the Maharajah used to present a banner to whichever party he judged to have acquitted itself with the greatest skill; and this was kept in the possession of that group until the following year.

As the performance is due to begin, lanterns, lamps, and torches are lighted as dusk deepens, around the specially prepared ground. Thousands of people converge on this spot from far outlying districts, threading their ways over tortuous mountain passes, weaving the paths of the dense forest,

ever watchful for leopards, tigers and bears which are continually on the prowl not four miles from the palace grounds.

At the appointed hour the weird tattoo of the drums silences the excited audience, and then the music starts, every note carried far across the still valleys during each of the five nights during which the dance continues, while the enormous audience remains rapt and silent, enchanted by the exquisite performance of the artistes.

The masks worn by the dancers are made to represent the mythological characters of the legends; only the body and limbs must tell the whole story in a language of highly stylised gesture and symbolic pose. The masks are made of wood or papier mache; the latter being preferred by the artistes on account of their being much lighter to wear than the wooden ones. The craft of moulding masks is an ancient one, the art having been handed down from father to son through countless generations. The workmanship is excellent, and continues to maintain the high standard of artistic perfection merited by the dance actors who are to wear them and give them life.

The music for the dancing is usually provided by a chorus of singers accompanied by a *dhol* (drum); and of itself this music never obtrudes but follows and reflects the mood which the dancer so impressively interprets; though nevertheless it provided a most appropriate and satisfying background to the atmosphere evoked from the strange dim past of the epics.

The orchestra comprises of Dhangra or Nagara, Dhol, Charchari or Tosha, Mridang (all kinds of drums and are used only with stage performances). Muhri or Sanhai, Singa, Madaubheri,

Mandira and flute. Now-a-days even violin, Sitar and Sarode are also used.

It is claimed for the costumes of the dancers that these too have deep significance psychologically and they are certainly the product of much ingenuity and skill; especially as regards the colours which more than any other factor are held to be powerful agents in suggesting the prevalent mood of any particular dance. The materials used are splendid brocades, richly wrought with gold and silver thread embroidery, but by no means gaudy or over-ostentatious.

There are two main categories of 'chow' dance. One is called "Pharikhandā", in which exercises with swords play a prominent part. The other is what we know today as 'chow' dance, based principally on the rhythmic variations of 'Laya'.

The individual dances of the series include solo, duet and group performances. Among those executed by a solo dancer, are the "Tandava" which is a frenzied expression of the divine grief of Shiva at the death of his consort Sati; the "Mayura" dance, which depicts the joy of the peacock at the arrival of the long-awaited rains; displaying his beauty and vanity as he rejoices in the life-giving freshness of the newly-bathed air, after the choking months of stifling heat that precede the rains, then the "Dhibara" dance of fishermen; the "Kuranga", a delightful exposition of the fright of the small deer during the monsoon storms in the forest; the "Sabara" or the hunter's dance, a great favourite especially when, as often happens, the dancer is almost carried away by his own enthusiasm as he joyously sights his victim, only to be disappointed when his arrows miss their mark, and then to be assailed by every possible peril of the jungle; and

finally, after all his trials, when at last successful, his ecstasy knows no bounds.

One or two solo dances represent female characters; of these perhaps the best is the beautiful 'Arati', which depicts a priestess offering votive lamps before an altar. Another very fine one, calling for great skill in miming is the "Durga" dance, which shows the slaying of the demon Mahishasura by the goddess Durga. Here the dancer displays also his skill in handling the various weapons of the legend—discus, thunderbolt, bow and arrows, sword and shield, battle-axe, lasso and spear.

Duet dances include the "Astra-dwanda", a sword dance; "Chandra-bhaga", depicting the story of the love of the sun-god for the maiden Chandrabhaga, whom he pursued with relentless ardour until, in despair, she plunged into the ocean; and "Vasuki-Garuda" the victory of Garuda, the eagle-vehicle of Vishnu, over the serpent-god, Vasuki. Finally, noteworthy among the Chow duets is the Radha-Krishna dance, celebrating the eternal love motif in the characters of the divine lovers.

After his attendance of the Chow dances, Uday Shanker wrote : "The show itself was magnificent; but its effects were heightened on account of the eager faces of the children and grown-up people who just throbbed with excitement.....it was a rare occasion for me to see such a fusion and harmonious blending of spirits and talents, where the yawning gulf between the dancers and the onlookers was bridged by an uninterrupted flow of the co-ordination of thoughts and feelings..... How few understand today the great part played by Art in life, and how by discarding it, we cut off

an important tributary from feeding our 'stream of life'."

Oraon Dance

A dance-series of great ethonological interest which is performed by the Oraons, and is in itself a history of the social and semi-religious beliefs of a superstitious people consists of those pantomimic representations of the symbolism in the lives of men, of the fundamental events in the course of nature.

These dances persist in Chhota Nagpur and take the form of a series of "marriage-dances", each of which is performed at that season of the year for which its imaginative symbolism stands. These marriage-dances are three in number; the 'ghostly weddings' at the beginning of the year, followed after the end of March by human weddings after which are performed the divine weddings; when the union of Mother Earth with the sun-god is celebrated.

After the harvesting of the crops, the village women unearth the bones of the dead from the village graveyard; and these are solemnly anointed with oil and turmeric powder, as bridal couples are anointed. The bones are then carried in procession, with music, to a stone-lined pit by the side of some stream or pool, where they are to be deposited. In the procession are also carried the benedictory 'karsa'-pot, and the 'chumka' or lampstand, used for the blessing of the union of the souls of the more recently dead with those of their ancestors. The rice, pulses, dal, and other food-stuffs cooked on that night are left at the pit to provide a wedding feast for the Oraon denizens of the land of the dead. A dancing festival known

as the *Harbori Jatra* (bone-burial) follows this wedding.

Later in the year, these ghostly weddings are followed by a dance-festival which symbolises human weddings and these dances are a joyous representation of the eternal and coquettish allure-ment of the female and the pursuit of the male in courtship. The main feature of these dances is the formation of lines of youths and girls advancing towards, and retreating from each other; arms interlaced, voices raised in romantic lyrics, at the termination of each of which there is a ritual chorus of sounds indicative of the deep yearning in the hearts of these supposedly love-sick young people. Drummers provide the only orchestral accompani-ment to these dances, with fitting plaintive rhythms, there being often as many as seven or eight assorted drums.

At the end of the season in which human marriage is celebrated, there is a great religious feast known as the *Sarhul*, at which is annually celebrated the marriage of Mother Earth with the sun-god. At this time all normal weddings must be postponed, while songs are sung, dances per-formed and rejoicings held in honour of the divine union, symbolised by the performance of a marriage ceremony between the village priest and his wife, these two, of course, representing the Sun God and Mother Earth. Until this union has been solemnly commemorated, the Oraon may not use, or gather the vegetables, fruits or flowers of the new season. Even the manuring of fields is forbidden, as Mother Earth, while yet a virgin, cannot be expected to yield her bounty.

It is interesting to note that in the final dances of this series, which represent the joys of wedded

life within the circle of the family, and surrounded by the all providing bounty of mother Earth, the sexes do not perform in separate files. The men and women are intermixed, generally being arranged in columns one behind the other, and each clasping the hand of his partner.

Dance of Bhatras

In the most southerly parts of the State of Orissa and almost bordering the Madras Presi-dency, one meets with bands of the tribe known as the Bhatras. They have a semi-religious dance-festival during the time of Holi, which seems to have lost all connection with the celebrations associated with the feast of Holi, and is nothing more than a petition to the gods for the success of their hunting expeditions.

On the festival of Holi, the men of the village go forth in a body from day-break till nightfall, on large hunting parties into the forest. On their return at night, there is general entertain-ment in the whole village, when the women join their menfolk in dancing and revelry, to the accom-paniment of songs, alternate stanzas of which are sung by the men on one side, to be answered by the women from the other side. The songs always open with an invocation to the crow, the fetish of the community, and call for a blessing on the morrow's hunting excursions. After this the men in boastful stanzas relate their exploits of the day, the women providing a chorus of praise and con-gratulation if, in fact, the day's hunting has been successful; but if it should have been a failure, their songs are only expressive of ribald ridicule.

The festal garb of the men on these occasions consists of a short *dhotie* bound about the loins,

secured by two brightly coloured strips of cloth which fall from the waist, in front and behind, to below the knees; their heads are gaily adorned with colourful turbans stuck with peacocks' feathers, and in their hands they carry short staves of bamboo, bound at the ends. As they dance they beat time by beating together these staves, and moving always by the successive breaking away of couples from the parties of four which form the basic pattern of the dance, in order to move on to form the next group of four. These dances are lively, and their patterns are pleasing to the eye. The occasion of these dances is the only time at which the Bhatras as a body give way to bacchanalian revelry, being as a rule a most industrious and sober community.

Another dance of the country, religious in character, but retaining all its religious significance, is to be found very frequently around Sambalpur, where the villagers, all ardent devotees of the Krishna cult, gather at night for the solemn performance of the Ram-Lila dances; celebrating again the romantic idylls associated with the life of the cowherd-god.

Every village of Orissa has a rich and varied repertoire of pastoral dances, which show no indication of ever having been associated with any religious ceremony or festival, as do most of the folk-dances of the country as a whole; they have sprung into being out of the sheer necessity of a rhythm-loving people to express itself in this medium. As a rule all these dances are extremely simple, but notwithstanding their simplicity, they are full of a natural grace and charm, and often embody quaint ideas springing from the social customs of the peasant communities. Each village has its village dancing

ground, usually the space between the large shed used as a communal dormitory for the young boys of the village and the similar dormitory for the girls. Whenever the boys convene at this place beating their drums, the girls run out to meet them and they all spend the evening in the wholehearted enjoyment of the dance, without undue interference on the part of fault-finding elders.

Dance of Bhuiyas

A particular section of the community known as the Bhuiyas have developed their simple village pastime into a light-hearted ritual of courtship. All those dancing parties held among the boys and girls of a village are considered much as one might regard rehearsals; and the serious business begins, when a well-practised party of young men sets off to a neighbouring village, laden with little gifts of sweetmeats, combs for the hair and other little trinkets calculated to win the esteem of the maidens to be visited. On arrival at the village chosen for the occasion, the young men proclaim their presence on the dancing green by loudly beating on their drums and tambourines, until a large enough band of girls appears to constitute a dancing party. The offerings of the visitors are first of all gallantly presented and graciously accepted; and then the girls set to work to provide refreshments for their guests.

After the foodstuffs have been consumed, the boys and girls dance together until far into the night, and next day more than one betrothal is announced to the village elders. If, as often happens, the dancing has continued till the following dawn, the girls again offer food to the young

men; after which the latter rise to depart, and still dancing and playing on their drums, they move away from the village, escorted by the girls as far as the boundary. This is usually some rock-broken rill with wooded banks; and here there is a halt, boys on one bank, girls on the other, while a valedictory song is sung; then, the song ended, the young girls courtesy to their swains, who gravely and formally bow in return, and then depart for their own village.

Not infrequently, the girls arrange clandestine return visits, when a long evening's dancing and merry-making is again enjoyed, but this time in the village of the boys.

Dance of Juangs

These Bhuiya dances are very closely resembled by those of a hill tribe, the Juangs. The Juangs, however, lack the easy grace and naivete of the Bhuiyas, so that their dances become monotonous and lifeless. Apart from the courtship dances, they have a good repertoire of animal dances, representing stories from the lives of the bear, pigeon, pig, tortoise and other wild animals with which the Juangs are familiar.

There prevails among the people of Orissa an interesting commemoration of the 'marriage-by-capture' custom, which survives in the folk-dances of many countries, particularly those of Central Europe and the Pyrenees. This Oraon version known as the Paika dance, takes place whenever a wedding procession approaches the precincts of a village. Men array themselves as warriors, and armed with wooden swords and shields, indulge in furious mock combat, which is accompanied by dancing akin to the old tribal war-dances, at the

end of which, the bride is, as if forcibly, borne away to the house of the bridegroom.

Karam Dances

Some of the pastoral dances are simply a translation into rhythmic representation, the everyday agricultural operations of the people. These 'Karam' dances are extremely graceful in posture, and generally set to a slow melody composed of just a few notes of close interval, unconscious symbol of the slow but irresistible progress of Nature in the fields. As in their work among the crops, so in their dances, the men and women are not intermixed, but dance in separate groups or columns, according as the pattern of the individual dance demands. The young men at times kneel while the girls approach, and bending low over their bowed forms, sway one arm to and fro as if cutting the paddy crop. These movements seem to have a more than merely imitative intention, and there is evidence that the ritual embodies an invocation to the spirits of nature in order that an abundant harvest may be ensured. This aspect of the dance is further borne out by the fact that the young man who leads the dance carries a *chamar*, or fan made from the wild date-palm leaf, which he waves over the ground as if coaxing the earth to yield in plenty. A chorus of ejaculations in a persuasive tone are uttered by the dancers at the beginning of each *Karam* song, whereby Mother Earth is further supplicated to hearken to the needs of her children. The "Mundari" dance is similar to the Karam, the only difference lies with the rhythm.

During the actual harvesting of the crops the men and women work side by side in the fields,

so that in that dance which represents the destruction of insect and other pests which ravage the ripened grain, men and women no longer dance in separate groups. With no musical accompaniment other than their own voices, the dancers move in a large circular pattern, swinging sticks and clubs in representation of the killing of wild animals and thieving birds. The performance of this dance is also supposed to have some occult power whereby the protection of the crops from this particular form of disaster may be assured.

Apart from these communal dances of the Oraons, there are any number of simple dances performed by groups of young girls in lane and courtyard for no other reason than the sheer joy of dancing them; and then there are also the magic religious dances performed at marriages and known as "Benjanalua"; in fact, it is not untrue to say that there is scarcely any moment, either religious or social, at which dancing would be inopportune among these people.

Besides the Hindu peasantry of this countryside, there are many tribal communities surviving in the remoter parts, in hill and forest districts, some of whom are almost absorbed into the social and religious life of the Hindu peasant, and some of whom live much as they have always lived from the beginning of time, their religion consisting for the most part of simple propitiation of the spirits of Nature, and generally less corrupted by a welter of superstition than the religion of the more civilised and worldly Hindu peasantry; their social laws ruled by a rough sense of justice dispensed by the headmen of the community without the need for recourse to demoralising litigations (of which the ordinary villager is so much a victim); their lives

ordered by the necessity to produce by the rudest methods, the necessary foodstuffs for their subsistence.

These tribal peoples have their own recreations, of which dancing is naturally the most common, this satisfying their need for ritual, their love of rhythm, their desire to commemorate the exploits of their hunting expeditions, to invoke the protection of their presiding deities, and to celebrate their battle prowess, this last being little more than a memory of the wars of their ancestors.

Santhal Dance

The best known and most numerous of these aboriginal peoples is the Santhal tribe. They have developed their traditional primitive dances into graceful performances not less pleasing than the folk-dances of the Oraon village communities. The Santhals too have their courtship dances. On full-moon nights, the big drum calls to the girls of the community, who then assemble under a spreading banyan tree, their garments adorned with flowers in Spring, or feathers in Winter. Meanwhile the young men with musical instruments begin to collect in the rice-fields beyond. The girls unconcernedly continue to complete their gala toilet, chattering together, totally unmindful of the growing impatience of their partners; until the men come forward with drum and song to demand to the commencement of the dance. Then the girls form a line, linked arm in arm, in twos; and the long line approaches and recedes with much graceful swaying of the head and body. During these dance performances the girls never mix with the men; it is only after the dancing that the young people have any opportunity to mingle and talk together.

The Santhals too have their pastoral dances, representative of the gathering of indigo, the reaping of grain, and the preparation for the hunt. They also possess many dances which are purely for the amusement of the onlookers; of these, the best known is that which depicts the quarrelling of co-wives. (Polygamy is not uncommon among this tribe.)

The Khonds of Angul District are another primitive community to whom the art of dancing is not unknown. The only musical instrument known to these people is the Pleka, made of two gourds attached on each end of a twelve-inch piece of bamboo, between which are extended the three strings. This instrument necessarily accompanies the love-songs of the young men, as well as every other festive occasion on which music is required. At the village dance parties, the girls, having bound about their waists lengths of brightly coloured cloth, join hands and form a circle; while the boys form a wider circle around them; and as they dance the boys and girls sing alternately verses spontaneously composed; and quite innocent of rhyme or metre, to one of the few simple tunes that they know and the accompaniment of their three-stringed "pleka". The movements of the actual dance are equally devoid of complexity, consisting merely of the whole party moving round in a circle, swaying their bodies, and keeping time by clapping their hands and clinking their anklets. It is only the inherent grace of every movement of these lithe bodies that imparts to these simple performances the real atmosphere of dance.

High up in the hills of the Koraput District lie the villages of the Bondo-Porajas, marked by the

little clusters of low grass-thatched thus standing under the jack-fruit and mango trees. In the open space in the midst of these clusters of houses are the raised platforms where the Bondo Porajas hold their dance festivals. These performances consist for the most part of spring-time celebrations, in which the dancers, consisting mostly of the women of the community, pose and step in their festal garments bearing in their arms branches of blossoming trees. At this time the women are gaily bedecked with anklets of tinkling bells, heavy brass necklets, and string upon string of little cowrie shells about their necks. These are intertwined with strings of brightly coloured glass beads, and the wrists and arms are laden with numbers of white glass bangles. The dress of the women consists of a length of striped cotton tied about the waist and hanging to below the knees; another length of similar material being tied around the breast, with the ends left long, and floating away behind with the movements of the dance.

Among the Oraons and the aboriginal tribes of this province there are many survivals of war dances. Perhaps these have persisted to the present time simply on account of there being so many aboriginal tribes in this district whose lives have fallen very little under the influence of ordinary village Hindu life, so that their ancient customs have changed little during the course of centuries.

In the performance of the war dances, musical instruments are not used at all except for a drum by which the rhythm is marked; neither are the dancers accompanied by the chorus of singers which often replaces an orchestra in village dancing. The dancers, all male, of course, carry warlike weapons which are waved aloft with much ferocious

shouting, while the men march solemnly around in a circle, now and then breaking into a run, and spreading out into long lines or columns in imitation of the formations of battle.

Jatra Dances

In some dances, as in those called "Jatra" dances, mock fights are staged between the men of one village and another. The two parties advance into their friendly combat carrying long poles surmounted by pennants, and brandishing sticks and clubs with such enthusiasm that one might readily infer that more serious warfare were imminent.

In the hilly districts to the north of Bihar, bordering on Nepal, and peopled with races definitely akin to the Nepalese, in that their culture, language, and physical types have much that is common to the true Nepalese, one comes across various folk-dances of the pastoral or warlike kind. There are the 'Tharus', a tribe who were probably driven out of Nepal, and have now been settled for many generations in the terai or foothill regions of Bihar. These are a short-statured, Mongoloid people who have a number of hunters' dances which they perform with great enthusiasm and realism, being themselves hunters. The dances are accompanied by songs, which are sung by one man, who does not himself take part in the actual dancing, the language of the songs being Nepalese. Rarely, a *dholak*, or large drum, also accompanies the dancing.

Dance of Hos

The 'Hos' of the Singbhum district, another mountain tribe, have a series of courtship dances

of a very sentimental quality consisting of much slow and languid posturing. Although the dances are in themselves not highly developed, the performance of them is one of the favourite occupations of the members of the 'Hos' people.

Maghi Dance

There is also the 'Maghi' dance, quite unlike the performances of the amorous 'hos', and this consists of a joyous, harum-scarum scamper of boys and girls through the village, and even from one village to another, the dance being not unlike a very breathless and lively '*grande galope*.' One of the greater celebrations has been described by a visitor in the following words: "More than three thousand people assembled and kept up dancing and feasting for two days and nights. I was much struck with the absence of drunkenness and revelry. Nonetheless, the young men and women seemed to enjoy themselves, devoting themselves assiduously to the dance, and to the refreshments liberally provided. It was odd to see an elderly beau join in the ranks of the dancers; his blue, green and red umbrella under his arms, and his countenance as serious as that of a judge, keeping step with great precision and posing in the most grotesque attitudes." In these festivals the men act as masters of ceremonies, and the lines of girls with arms entwined suit their steps and figures to those of the men who dance in front of them.

Jata Jatin Dance

Mithila is the home of "Jata Jatin" dance, performed only by womenfolk, on moonlit nights during the monsoon. They dance from evening

to dawn being accompanied by a drum. In the pantomime they enact the love episode of Jata and Jatin. The story goes on to say that Jata and Jatin were deeply in love with each other. A boatman, who was the villain, kidnapped Jatin. Both Jata and Jatin had to suffer a great deal before they were united and lived happily together.

To celebrate Jomnama festival, when the harvest is over, and Ba festival, during the spring, the rural population has a number of colourful dances and pleasing songs. They decorate their houses with fresh flowers and singing and dancing continue for several days.

Hero festival is celebrated during the sowing time, when a ceremonial dance is performed with the accompaniment of chorus songs. The performers seek the blessings of the deity of the grove, known as Dasauli, for an early and bountiful crop.

The "Maya Shavari" dance is a group dance, narrating the theme of Parvati's successfully avenging the humiliation of her husband, Shiva. After Samudramanthana (churning of the ocean) Vishnu disguised as the enchantress Mohini tempted Shiva. Naturally Parvati was enraged, and to take revenge against Vishnu she was reborn as Shavari. She tempted Krishna, who became desperate and followed her to Mount Kailasa. There Shiva was enraged and was about to slay him when Shavari as Parvati explained the position to Shiva. Krishna was put to shame and begged for his life. He was pardoned by the couple.

CHAPTER V

BENGAL

In the sphere of folk-dance, until only a few years ago, the educated classes of Bengal were under the belief that no indigenous dances worth the name had been contributed by them to the synthesis of Indian culture, although they were fully aware of Bengal's rich store of folk-music and folk-song. This may have been due to the fact that the poet Rabindranath Tagore had taken from this abundance of raw material, the basis of his inimitable lyric creations; so that only after interest in rural art had been stimulated by the work of this prolific genius, did vast numbers of people discover that all around them in the villages the art of folk-dancing had been flourishing all the time, manifesting itself in many beautiful and interesting dances, mainly religious in character, but not excluding the other themes always found in the dance of the people, namely, those dealing with love, war and pastoral subjects.

Another stimulus to the awakening of interest in the folk-dance of Bengal was provided by the work of the late Mr. G. S. Dutt, I.C.S., founder of the Bratachari Movement. He has revived this art in Bengal and introduced it into a cultural movement that has become wellknown throughout the world. The word 'brata' signifies a solemn vow, or more loosely, an ideal; while 'chari' denotes one who strives to carry out an ideal.

According to a Bratachari, life cannot be divided into separate water-tight compartments. Physical culture, for example, cannot be regarded otherwise than as inextricably bound up with the other activities of one's life, both mental, spiritual and bodily; so that according to this conception it is a mistake to pursue art for its own sake, or to pursue economic and industrial interests to the exclusion of the cultural arts of joy, which represent a deeper self-expression of the spirit. So the Bratachari movement and discipline combine in one system of training all the various aspects of human activity, and attempt to build up life as a synthetic whole.

This movement has been introduced into schools among both boys and girls, and is based on the observance of five 'bratas'—Knowledge, Diligence, Truth, Unity and Pleasure. In connection with the last of these was the art of dancing revived, and two of the set functions of Bratachari are 'Kritya' and 'Nritya' (action and dance).

The influence of this movement has been much wider than a merely local one in the country of its origin; and during recent years members have been invited by the World Congress of Faiths to London, to the seventh World Conference of the New Education and Fellowship at Chattenham, The World Congress of Leisure Time and Recreation at Hamburg, and the World Congress of Work and Joy in Rome. The late Rai Sahib Jagadnanda Rai of Shantiniketan, who was a great educationist, once wrote to the late Mr. Dutt in a letter: "It is from your writings that we have, for the first time, become aware of the fact that such beautiful indigenous dances still exist in our country."

As a matter of fact, it was even found that

dances existed in various districts, that belonged to the leisure and devotional occupations of even the Brahmin women. This was certainly a big surprise to the half-sophisticated members of the upper castes, who had come to regard the pursuit of folk-art as something crude and undignified.

Noteworthy among the dances of Bengal today are those surviving at Mymensingh; mask-dances of a ritualistic character, which are performed in the open air on the occasion of the annual religious festival of Chaitra Sankranti. There are four or five dances of great popularity, and of these the most frequently performed is that representing the god Mahadeva (Shiva) and the goddess Kali, to whom great devotion is paid by the people of Bengal. The costumes of these performances is of the simplest, being made by the local village artisans themselves. The village carpenter makes the masks and the local potter paints them. As often, male roles are played by boys.

For the dance of Mahadeva, the artist puts on a common red loin cloth, the upper part of the body being kept naked except for the liberal smearing with ashes. This is the representation of Shiva as the great ascetic, and the scant clothing together with the ashes smeared on the body denote throughout India the *sannyasi*, or the one who has renounced the world. A double string of *rudraksha* seeds is worn about the neck, these being the Hindu version of a rosary, and on the head is worn a wig of black hair with two long matted locks hanging one on each side of the head to below the knees (for the ascetic does not cut hair, or attend to it in any way).

The dancer takes the mask reverently in his hands and advances a few steps towards the audi-

ence, then he prostrates himself until his head rests on the ground as an act of devotional preparation to his assumption of the role of a divine being. When he has covered his head with the mask, two attendants tie the strings behind, and place in his right hand a 'trisul' (trident), and in his left a conch-shell (shankha).

The mask itself is made of mango-wood, and the surface of it is plastered with clay, which, when dry, is thickly covered with paint, white for the entire surface, and black for the delineation of the features. The third eye of Shiva is painted on the forehead of the mask.

The dance, which is an exposition of Shiva's ascetic aspect, is accompanied by the beating of the 'dhak', (a big drum) and no other musical instrument. Occasionally a chorus accompanies the dancer with devotional songs. The dance begins with slow measured steps and gestures which gradually assume a greater speed and fervour as the dancer becomes more and more carried away by the fanaticism of his religious enthusiasm, until his performance comes to a sudden and dramatic climax which leaves him exhausted.

After the dance of Mahadeva, is the dance of Kali. This grotesque goddess wears a mask painted blue, with much attention to the whites of the eyes. Red paint is used to denote the streams of blood issuing from the sides of the mouth, and trickling down to the chin. A *khanra*, (Bengali curved sword) is placed in the dancer's right hand. Mahadeva, dressed for his dance as *sannyasi*, comes on to the arena, and lies prostrate on the ground. Kali, entering, makes a few rounds of the arena, then places one foot lightly on Mahadeva's chest, and in that position performs a few simple and rapid

dance gestures. Then leaving Mahadeva she performs her own vigorous whirling dance, during which Mahadeva makes his exit. Her dance continues with a great brandishing of her avenging sword, and as the dance proceeds the rhythm becomes more and more frenzied, and the movements of the dancer assume a wilder abandon, until the performance acquires much of the madness of the Tandava dance (Shiva's dance of grief at the death of his consort).

Another dance known to the Mymensingh masked players is the one known as Bura-Buri (old man and old woman), a duet wherein two artistes, wearing masks to represent extreme age, move in rhythmic unison to the accompaniment of the rhythms of the drum. This dance depicts the joyous harmony of a long conjugal existence, and the indwelling spirit of work and joy even among the aged. The dance consists of a masterful blending of humour and profundity as it relates the joys and vicissitudes of a long life.

There are other mask dances enjoying an almost equal popularity, such as the Radha-Krishna series, showing episodes from the ever-appealing romances of the divine Krishna and his consort Radha; the Hara-Parvati dances, also depicting a divine romance, namely, that of Shiva and Shakti; the Ganga dance, a choreographic description of the river Ganges in all its moods and seasons.

A dance which is not so commonly seen these days, but which seems to have been very popular until about thirty or forty years ago is the "Khemta". This too is a devotional dance. It is usually danced by one or more women of the professional dancing-girl class. When there are two or more than two, they may dance together, but more often one

dances while the others stand apart and watch, replacing her one by one until all have taken their turns.

Formerly this dance was very popular in the celebration of births and marriages; and sometimes it was also performed at such festivals as Durga Puja and Dol Jatra. The main places for these performances, in the days when they were in vogue, were the courtyards of the houses of big zamindars (the rich landholder class), *Barwaritolas* (central open green in a village or quarter of a town), and *Natmandirs* (dancing halls or courtyards attached to the temples). The songs which accompany the dances are those relating to the loves of Krishna and Radha; but in its decline the dance became very erotic and so gradually fell into general disrepute. At present it is slowly receding into oblivion and is rarely to be seen.

In this kind of dance, the most intricate footwork wove into the dance complicated and delightful patterns. The movement of the feet required great agility and long practice. The dancers also brought into play their eyes, as much as any other part of the body, and much movement of the hips which required skilful muscle control in order to convey an impression of effortless balance.

The dancing girls wore for these performances richly ornamented *saris* costing up to several hundred rupees, and also adorned themselves with gold ornaments of great value, which included bangles, necklaces, ear-rings, and the '*sinthi*', a gold pendant worn across the brow, and supported across the head by a gold chain.

The orchestra consisted of a set of *tablas*, (a highly-evolved type of drum requiring much skill on the part of the drummer), and two *sarangis* (a

multi-stringed instrument). Another feature of the decadence of this form of dance was the introduction into the orchestra of the harmonium.

The famous 'Jatra' is rather an operatic than a dance performance, which is staged nowadays either in the courtyards of zamindars' houses or in the open greens of villages. Formerly it belonged to the Natmandirs.

The word 'Jatra' means 'journey', but in the course of time the dance dramas themselves have become known as Jatras. The name must have arisen from the fact that the shows are enacted by travelling players; or else from the fact that the themes of the drama constitute a form of pilgrimage through the lives of the divine beings about whom they are centred.

In Bengal, the stories of the plays are always from the Krishna-Lila, boys taking the parts of the females in the stories; the *gopikas* (female attendants of Radhika) and Radha. Jatra not only prevails throughout Bengal, but in many other parts of India too. Everywhere some form of Jatra exists, known under varying names, such as Ram-Lila in the Uttar Pradesh. In some provinces, but not in Bengal, themes from the Ramayana are preferred to Krishna-Lila. Formerly, the Ramayana provided the popular subjects for the Jatra shows of Bengal too, but with the advent of Sri Chaitanya Deva, ardent apostle of Krishna, the Krishna-Lila became the most acceptable source of subject-matter for the dramas to the able followers of the Krishna cult.

The main factor in these performances is not the dancing itself, but the acting and melodious singing with incidental dances by the *gopikas* and *sakhis* (female friends). During recent years, the

actors have had opportunities to see the Krishna dances of the theatrical stages of Calcutta, and are trying to imitate these and introduce into their purely rural art, so that the true Jatra is gradually becoming less practised in favour of a more sophisticated version of itself.

The originator of the Jatra as it is known in Bengal, Chaitanya Deva, used to sing and dance in ecstasy, inspired by the sacred lyrics dedicated to Krishna, so that after him, writers of songs sprang up in great numbers who used to treat the Krishna-Lila in dramatic verse, and these poems were acted. Among these poets mention should be made of Lochan Das (1523-1589), Jagganath Vallabh, and Jadunandan Das (1607); while among famous dramas there are the '*Vidagdhamadhava*' by Rupagoswami, translated into Bengali as '*Radha-Krishna-Lilakadamba*', and Prem Das's '*Chaitanya Chandrodaya Kaumudi*' (1712). These poets were followed by dramatists who wrote short plays in prose, and these too were staged and became very popular throughout the country. Some of the most popular themes in these dramas were Kaliya-Daman, or the killing of the demon-serpent by Krishna, and Nimayi Sannyasa, or pacification of Radha.

The performance of these dramas is accompanied by an orchestra made up of a *dhol* (drum) and a chorus of singers, dressed in their peculiar long white robes known as 'choga'. Recently, the violin and flute have been added to this, and also unfortunately, the ubiquitous harmonium.

A troupe of Jatra players is always under the management of one who is known as the 'adhikari'. The first manager traceable is Paramananda of Birbhum, who lived in the latter part of the

eighteenth century. After him came Shridam Subal, who became greatly enamoured by his audiences on account of his songs relating to 'Aqrur Sangbad' and 'Nimayi Sannyasa'. He was followed by a long succession of managers none of whose names have been lost right up to the present day.

The 'Kirtan' dance is perhaps the most widely practised of all the folk-dances in Bengal. It is of great antiquity, and is associated with the worship of Vishnu, but it was the great religious revivalist, Chaitanya Deva, who gave it its present character. Perhaps the most striking feature of 'kirtan' is its democratic note for the people of a whole village, rich and poor, young and old, zamindar and tenant, freely join in it without any distinction of caste or rank. The dance is performed to the accompaniment of the 'khol' (a rural drum) and the general form of the whole dance is extremely simple since it consists of the devotees moving round in a circle raising and lowering their hands in time with the beating of the drum. It is, however, a dance of great spiritual fervour in which the religious emotions of the dancers are worked up to fanatical pitch, so that the dance usually ends in a sort of ecstasy of feeling. Occasionally the form of the dance is varied by its being taken as a procession through the village. This is called 'Nagar-Kirtan'.

The 'Incense' dance and the 'Avatar' dance of Faridpur are typical of the ritual dances connected with the "Charak-Ghambira" festival, which is celebrated at the end of the Bengali year.

The incense dance probably had its origin in some occult rites which have since been forgotten. Each dancer holds in one hand an earthen incense burner, containing glowing charcoal, into which

he flings a handful of incense each time the movement of the dance brings him past the extended hand of one who stands outside the ring of dancers holding a plentiful supply of this necessity. As the incense is hurled by the dancers one after another into the censers, the fire and smoke leap up with sudden vigour, and on a dark night this dance is almost spectacular performance, as the figures of the dancers spring suddenly into vivid life at each spasmodic burst of light.

There are no songs to accompany this dance, and no instruments other than the drum.

After the ritual burning of the incense, the dancers join hands and leap around in circle for some time to terminate the performance.

The Avatar dance depicts the ten Avatars or incarnations of Vishnu, and is comprised of great variety of mimetic gestures and symbolic actions by which the different incarnations are described. It is performed to the accompaniment of drums, and is interspersed with the incantations of 'mantras' (literally prayers) uttered by the principal dancer or 'bala' as he is called.

A brata form of ritual dance is performed by women of respectable, good-class Hindu families in the village of Rajghat in the Jessore district. According to the late Mr. Dutt: "In a place called Buna not far from the village is an ancient temple of the goddess Sitala (the goddess who is believed to avert small-pox). Under the spreading banyan tree close by the temple is a place known as Sitala Tala or the abode of Sitala. Hindu women of all ages and castes, from about sixty or seventy villages in the vicinity, come to this spot to offer Puja (ritual worship) to the goddess. The women make 'manat', or a vow promising puja

to the goddess to invoke her aid in averting small-pox, overcoming barrenness, or various other desirable objectives."

Three, five or seven days before the Puja, the preceding ceremonies begin in the house of the woman who has taken the vow, she herself observing a strict fast on that day. All the adult women of the village are invited to attend this occasion. After they have assembled, they go in procession to the bathing *ghat* at the water's edge, uttering as they go, cries of "Ulu", the traditional community yell practised by Hindu women of all classes in Bengal on all ceremonial occasions. Arrived at the *ghat*, she who has made the vow, places a brass pot on a small winnowing tray (*kula*), and entering the water with this on her head, completely immerses herself. Having completed the ceremonial bath, she and her escort return to her house, she all the time carrying the now consecrated pot on her head. On reaching home she places the pot in the appointed place in her house, and her companions remain before it all night, keeping vigil and singing together religious songs, with no instrumental accompaniment, the first of the songs always being the 'Bandana', or invocation.

On the days following this ceremony, the women go in procession from house to house throughout the village with the consecrated pot on its *kula*. At each house they have to beg for gifts of rice or money, with the help of which the contemplated puja will be accomplished in a befitting manner. As the procession enters each house in the village, the lady of the house spreads out the ceremonial cloth (*asan*) on the floor of her courtyard. The *kula* with the sacred pot on it is placed on the centre of the *asan*, and the

processionists perform solemn dances round it to the accompaniment of the 'dhak', a drum played by a man of the Rishi caste (professional drummer of a very low caste). Thus the worshippers dance in each house of the neighbourhood, for three, five or seven days, according as has been promised to the goddess, after which they proceed to the shrine of Sitala, and offer the promised puja.

Although performed in connection with solemn rites, all the dances performed in the household courtyards are not of a ritualistic nature, though many of them undoubtedly bear traces of a ritualistic origin. During the course of time, where all arts are handed down traditionally from one generation to the next, there has inevitably been much change in the form and atmosphere of the original dances. Indeed, many of the dances now are no more than a spontaneous expression of the joy of living, through their mimetic representations of the scenes and incidents of the village life so familiar to the performers. Some are even of a distinctly humorous tone.

The dancers, in ring formation, move slowly round with very little foot-work, but a great variety of movement in the gestures of the hands and arms. Among the women of the upper classes, the movements of the dance are, generally speaking, much more restrained and gentle than among the ordinary peasant women and except when the dancing is performed as the procession moves from place to place, the feet are hardly ever lifted entirely off the ground. Although the foot-work is in itself somewhat monotonous, it lends a peculiar dignity and solemnity to the dance, especially as the movements of the upper part of the body are undoubtedly of extreme grace and beauty.

The 'Madol Puja' or drum worship, is an interesting spectacle which has somehow become part of the wedding ceremony in some parts of Bengal, even among Brahmin families. The dhak, dhol, or madol, though played by men of the depressed classes, is held in high spiritual esteem as embodying the spirit of divine rhythm. During the Madol Puja, the drum, held by the drummer, is venerated by offerings of flowers from a *kula*, to the accompaniment of the Madol Puja dance. Broadly speaking, the dances of secular or semi-secular functions, such as weddings, are performed to the accompaniment of 'dhol' or 'Madol', whereas, for solemn ritual occasions, the 'dhak', a much larger drum, of heavier tone, is played.

In Western Bengal, folk-dancing among women of the higher castes has almost disappeared, and survives now only in the 'Bhajo' dances, performed by unmarried girls during the month of Bhadra, in connection with the autumn devotions to the god, Indra. In the eastern parts of the provinces, however, there have been fewer sophisticating influences, and the higher castes in these districts have not forgotten the simple joys that form integral part of their cultural background.

Although most of the dances of Bengal survive either as parts of a religious ceremony, or in connection with the festivities that accompany religious ceremonies, there are a few dances which exist solely as expressions of the natural enjoyment of rhythmic movement, which is an essential characteristic of the people of this country. Of such a kind are the 'Baul' song and dance performances, which prevail through the entire length and breadth of Bengal among the Hindu communities. The dances are performed either as solos

or group efforts, to the accompaniment of many simple stringed instruments and drums. The most striking feature of the dancing is the reckless atmosphere of joyous abandonment which pervades it, and which is in complete accord with the sentiments of the gay little songs, to which the dances are an accompaniment. Baul dancing and singing are connected with no particular season or festivity, but can be performed at any time, and exist purely for the self-gratification of the dancers themselves, although there are wandering bands of dancers who make a living out of giving their repertoire in the courtyards of private houses, or on village greens, for the incidental diversion of the inhabitants who are prepared to engage them for an hour or so.

One or two dances found among the simpler folk of Bengal have been handed down from a more bloodthirsty past, and are of a definitely warlike character. Among these is 'Raibeshe', performed by men only, and found in the western regions of Birbhum, Burdwan, and Murshidabad. The performers belong to the Bauris, Domes and other depressed castes of the Hindu community. A 'kansi' (small gong) helps to supply the rhythm in conjunction with the 'dhol'. The dancers themselves wear brass anklets called 'nupurs' on the right ankle, to augment this primitive form of orchestra. The Raibeshe dance is one of the most manly and vigorous of all the folk-dances. It is frequently punctuated by wild yells of warlike excitement, which accompany gestures suggestive of the drawing of the bow, the hurling of spears and brandishing of knives. At times the dancers advance in a crouched position towards the centre of the ring, alternately joining and extending the

bended knees, in imitation of the movement of hunters on horseback. At other times, the dancers form pairs, and one bears his partner aloft on his shoulder and in this position each performs, in harmony, similar movements of the hands and arms, the upper partner alone being able to perform the head movements of the dance, and the lower one supplying the foot-work. This is a performance that requires high acrobatic skill, and assiduous practice before the dances can be rendered with the remarkable valour, and artistic grace for which they are renowned.

The 'Dhali' dance of Jessore and Khulna is another martial dance. It is performed with wooden swords and shields, to the accompaniment of 'dhol' and 'kansi' (drum and gong). The movements of the hands and arms, as well as the foot-work, are extremely agile and vigorous, and the dance contains interludes in the form of mock fights with lathis, or poles, as well as with sword and shield.

The 'Kathi' dance is a survival of a long dead aggressiveness, but has lost most of its pristine character, being today performed for the amusement of the dancers themselves and a village audience, to the accompaniment of songs which commemorate not the lusts of battle, but the daily occupations of rustic life. It belongs exclusively to the members of the lower castes, and the form of the dance is mainly a skilful exposition of rhythmic foot-work, accompanied by the beating of sticks held in the hands of the performers. The rhythm is kept up without any break for long periods during which there are numerous patterns threaded by the feet of the dancers roughly following the outline of a circle, which from time to time is

broken and re-formed as the dancers form pairs first with their left-hand neighbours, and then with those on their right; while the clicking of the sticks never loses its very definite rhythm, and the feet of the dancers keep strictly to the timing set by the sticks. There are many diversions to this dance, of which the most interesting is that in which one of the players steps out from the ranks of his companions and throwing himself supine in the centre of the circle, continues to dance round and round in that position, without ever missing a beat either of his feet or sticks. These sticks are thought to be vestiges of the weapons with which the dance was erstwhile performed and the one who lies in the centre was undoubtedly the unfortunate victim of the tribes' wrath.

Among the primitive tribal peoples inhabiting the Bankura district, dancing has a foremost place in their simple forms of pastime. Generally, but not invariably, only the women and girls dance, the men provide the musical accompaniment. The women range themselves in a circle, sometimes two or three rows deep, half facing the centre, where the men stand beating the drums ('nagara') to make time for the dancers, who move round the circle with slow and graceful steps, sometimes advancing and then retiring. The dance is a harmless and even pretty pastime in itself, but unfortunately, the participants have made its performance the occasion of much drinking and licence. During the dance, the women now and then break forth into a weird plaintive chant, somewhat startling when heard for the first time, but not at all unpleasant. All the music of the Santhal and kindred tribes, of which these people are one, strikes the stranger as some sort of wailing

funeral dirge, but when one gets accustomed to it, one realises that it has a very real fascination of its own.

The Mohammedians of almost every district of rural Bengal have incorporated dancing into their great mourning period of Moharrum as part of the ceremonies which express their grief. Mymensingh is the place most famed for the enthusiasm of its Moharrum dancers, and the principal dances are those called 'Marcia' and 'Jari' (mourning). The dancers form themselves into a ring, and holding up the flowing skirts of their dhoties in one hand, and waving scarlet pieces of cloth in the other, they move round stamping out a rhythm with the aid of the bell-anklets worn on the ankles, to the tune of songs led by the precentor of the group, who stands outside the ring of the performers and intones the dirges relating the tragic events on the battlefield of Kerbala, when the brothers Hassan and Hussein met their untimely ends.

Apart from these dances which take place during Moharrum, there seems to be little attraction in this form of expression among most Mohammedan communities. The life and energy of the dance seem to be derived almost entirely from incidents in the colourful lives of the Hindu heroes and gods, whose festivals are celebrated in great number throughout the Hindu year, or from the incidents of the peasants' own lives, lived so close to Nature, and so dependent on her moods.

CHAPTER VI

THE PUNJAB, KASHMIR, HIMACHAL
PRADESH, SINDH AND BALUCHISTAN

An account of the folk-dancing of the Punjab is inextricably bound up with the pageantry of the religious festivals of the Kulu Valley. Throughout the summer, from mid-May till mid-October there is an unbroken succession of fairs throughout the upper valleys of the Punjab rivers; and these, since they embrace the whole ambit of the religious and social life of the region, are the only occasions when the hard-working agricultural population can express itself in dance and song.

The fairs are held in honour of the local gods, exacting deities who demand endless propitiation from their devotees, through the agency of their grasping attendant priests; hence the necessity to fete them during the harvest season.

The presiding deity of the whole Kulu Valley is Raghunath, a form of Vishnu and at the end of the summer the greatest fair of all is held to pay homage to Raghunath. This coincides with the Hindu holy season of Dassera, and is celebrated with all the splendour available to these simple people during the ten days of its duration. At this time, when the whole population is anxious to please its mightiest deity, the minor *deotas* (gods) from every village and hamlet, who have already received their

annual homage in the local fairs are brought to the great Dassera festival held in the ancient capital of Sultanpur, to pay their individual homage to the most terrible of the gods who control the destinies of the people in these upland valleys.

Nearly every hamlet has at least one fair during the summer, and as the arrangements for these seem to be made with some care, no two villages hold their festivities on the same days, and there is always a fair in progress somewhere.

At about the middle of May, when the wheat and barley is ready for the sickle, and the young rice is sufficiently strong to be planted out in the fields in the lower areas, the idol is carried out of his temple by the attendant priests, and is borne to the village green, accompanied by a band of musicians blaring forth their somewhat uncouth music from trumpets, aided by drums and cymbals. On the green, the idol is often awaited by a few guest idols from neighbouring villages, each with its own escort of attendants, worshippers and musicians.

All the people are dressed in their best, and gaily decorated with flowers; shopkeepers set up stalls for the sale of sweetmeats, toys and endless tnick-knacks; and somewhere in the background can be found the tents where 'lugri', the locally distilled spirit, can be procured. No important commerce is carried on at any of these little fairs, except the one at Banjar, which forms a market for the sale of sheep and goats. This is attended by butchers from as far away as Simla, and by Garhwalas who wish to buy the sturdy goats as pack animals.

At the appointed time, the *deota* himself,

surrounded by his retinue, dances oscillated up and down in his chair by his carriers, who are supposed to be animated only by the volition of the god; and sometimes one of his guest *deotas* dances alongside him, the pair exchanging grotesque bows and salutations, as they proceed along their way. The men in the crowd become wildly excited at this manifestation of the presence of their deity, and joining hands, they form a ring about the idol and his attendants, dancing and shouting the words of the hymns which the musicians are playing on their instruments. Faster and wilder grows the dance as evening approaches, fresh dancers always being available to replace those who collapse from exhaustion, and the revel continues till nightfall, when the idol is returned to his shrine. The women with their gay head-dresses form a bright background to this spectacle, as they watch from the surrounding hill-slopes, terraced into stone tiers for the accommodation of spectators. The women rarely join in the dancing, but in some few villages they may form a separate ring from the men and dance or even in some more remote places, they join their men-folk and dance in the same ring with them.

Everywhere, however, it is only the Brahmins and Kanats who are admitted to the privileged circle of dancers, low-caste people being strictly excluded, and sometimes outsiders, even of the higher castes, if not worshippers of the god, are not even allowed upon the green.

The god can, if necessary, be invoked on occasions other than these general ones. Thus at reaping time, if an agriculturist has misgivings about the bounty of his crop, the *deota* is brought to the field before the last load of corn is cut, and

is danced as at the fairs. This ensures a good return of grain. The farmer rewards the god by feasting his attendants, without which the whole ceremony would unfortunately be invalid.

When the little fairs are all over, then comes the time for the great parade of all the *deotas* at the Dassera fair in Kulu, in honour of the greatest of all hill gods, Raghunath. In olden days, the *deotas* were brought in at the express command of the ruler, who seems to have had the same absolute sway over the local gods as he had over his subjects; and this subservience of religion to the secular power still continues in the neighbouring State of Mandi. Doubtless this subjection was originally based on the fact that the temples derived their income from land endowments held at the king's pleasure. The revenue of about one-seventh of the cultivated area of the Kulu Valley was alienated in this manner; but now that the land is held at the pleasure of an unbelieving foreign power, the *deotas* can dare to be a little less scrupulous about paying their annual homage to Raghunath, especially if the Dassera festival chances to fall at a time which coincides with harvesting operations in the surrounding districts.

The Dassera festival, however, by no means, lacks its swarms of devotees, amusement-seekers and pilgrims, pouring in from all sides, for days before the festival is officially due to commence, accompanying local deities with all the pomp available in the form of banners, trumpets and drums, and gaily coloured festal attire.

On arrival at the plain near the town, encampments are formed, and almost at once adherents of various shrines form processions to parade their *deota* in all his magnificence, as a preliminary

spectacle and a foretaste of what will be seen when the actual celebrations begin in earnest. Meanwhile the attendants of Raghunath himself have not been idle, and have prepared the sacred car which is to take the god out on his state procession, by decorating it with coloured cloths and flowers, and providing it with the wheels which are removed each year after the festivities are over, when the car is left out on the open plain until again required.

At the beginning of the ceremonies, the idol is brought out from the Raghunath temple and enthroned on its car. All the minor deities are brought with every possible show of pomp and music, and arranged round the central figure. Then the high priest steps out in front, and prays aloud, sprinkling water before the throne of the idol after which the leading men of Kulu pace three rapid circuits about the sacred car amid the incessant braying of the trumpets, and beating of cymbals and drums. Stout ropes are next attached to the lower timbers of the car, by which it is drawn along by hundreds of willing hands, while numbers of village idols with their enthusiastic crowds of adherents precede and surround the triumphal car on its ritual procession to the large decorated tent that awaits the occupation of the god for the five days of his *puja*.

During the next three days the *deotas* pay visits to one another and receive the homage of their devotees. The large green is covered with the circles of fanatical dancers, while the groups of brightly-dressed women look on. Towards dusk when all the gods are worshipped together, to the usual noisy accompaniment of drum and trumpet, the din is immense. Nor does night bring respite, for the broad harvest moon diffuses

its clear soft radiance, in which the Sarajis, best and most indefatigable of dancers, carry on even after all the *deotas* have retired for the night. It is not till the small hours that the crowd gradually disperses, and the plain becomes dotted with sleeping figures, wrapped in their homespun blankets upon the hard ground, with no roof but the stars.

On the last day of the fair the triumphal car of Raghunath is again brought forth to carry the idol to the crest of the steep bank overlooking the Beas River, from where excited crowds witness the decapitation of a buffalo, and various smaller animals, including a crab, down on the margin of the river; and after this sacrifice, a figure representing Lanka is beheaded to celebrate the victory of Raghunath over the personification of Evil. Then the car is dragged back across the plains to as near the bank of the Sarvari stream as possible, across which the idol is carried in a pretty little wooden palanquin to his temple in the palace of the old Rajas. By an early hour the next morning, all the *deotas* and their followers have dispersed to their hamlets.

When the fair falls as late as the middle of October, great additional interest is lent to it by the caravans of picturesquely clad Yarkandis and Ladakis, who are on their long journeys from Central Asia with ponies, silks and carpets for sale in the plains of India.

The god Raghunath is feted on one other occasion in the year, that of the Pipal Jatra celebrations, when he is brought out from his temple to be bathed in the Beas River, the attendance at this festival, though numerous, is very much less than at the Dassera Fair, but is celebrated

with the same reckless abandonment of the god's followers to singing and dancing in his honour.

Chief of the other religious festivals celebrated during the winter and spring in Kulu, is the Koli-ri-Diwali, when the image of the *deota* is not, as a rule, produced. This feast does not seem to have any connection with the Diwali festival of the plains, and is celebrated not in November as is the better-known Diwali, but at the end of December. During the evenings preceding it, the men of each village congregate on their village green to sing and dance until a late hour, when a chorus in praise of the goddess, Devi Hirma, is shouted, and then with cheers and great acclamations, all disperse to their homes.

During the singing, the men dance slowly in a circle, occasionally breaking into a wild and sudden gallop, each tugging his neighbour towards the inside or the outside of the ring until some one gets exhausted, and lets go, with the resultant collapse of that particular number. This is an extremely crude and primitive form of dance celebration, but whether they have a highly developed sense of the art or not, the inhabitants of these valleys seem to possess a natural urge which impels them to express themselves in dancing. On the evening of this festival of lights, all the houses are illuminated with lamps and torches through every hamlet up and down the Beas valley, and the effect of these twinkling myriads of little lights, up and down the expanses of the black mountain sides, is one of great beauty. The signal for the lighting of the lamps is given from the walls of the old castle at Naggar, the most prominent landmark of the valley, and from here it is caught up at once by the nearby villagers,

and flashed on, up and down the slopes and gullies till the whole night is adorned by its sparkling loveliness.

The only other dances of a ritual nature that occur in this region are those performed every year at Leh, the capital of Ladakh, and the highest city in the world, being thirteen thousand feet above sea-level. These dances are the famous masked devil dances of the Buddhist monks, who come out from the fastnesses of their mountain monasteries to exercise the evil spirits afflicting their followers in the magic ritual of these dances. The weird beauty of these dances is of such fame that every year numbers of tourists deem it worthwhile to make the long trek from Kashmir, through snow-bound mountain passes and over great tracts of almost uninhabited highland to witness these dances for the few days of their duration at Leh, in the month of June.

In the lowlands of the Punjab, professional dancing girls are much in demand on all social occasions for the entertainment of guests; and their dancing is enjoyed for its own sake and not, as elsewhere, as a ritual observance in connection with some religious celebration. Of course, the people of the villages are not all so sophisticated that they do not themselves ever care to take an active part in dance entertainments among themselves; and there are many popular romantic ballads, the themes of which provide material for both song and dance, as the peasants enact in dance the tragic tale of legendary lovers being poured forth upon their ears by the lamentations of the musicians.

Of the stories most in vogue among the agricultural population, the favourites are the ballads

"Mirza Sahib ki Sur" and "Waris Shah ki Hir". The first describes the ill-fated love of the noble and handsome Mirza for a Jat Mussalmani girl, Sahiba. The parents of these two had no intention of allowing the course of true love to run smooth; and when the young lovers ran away together, they were pursued and put to death. Well told, this story has a deep emotional effect on the easily-swayed hearts of the audience, and its recital forms part of nearly every festive gathering. The second story is very similar, as are all the great love stories of folk-lore all the world over; and describes the love of Hir and Ranjha. The parents of Ranjha, not approving of her choice, married her against her will to another man, from whom, after much suffering, she eventually contrived to run away and rejoin her never-forgotten hero, Hir. It has often been asserted that the people of the Punjab are a race without compassion or tenderness, but the very popularity of these romantic legends is sufficient to give the lie to such a statement.

In the villages of Patiala State, the hiring of professional dancers and singers is the most common form of social entertainment. Those found in the towns are often very proficient exponents of their art, the musicians here being the Rababis, that is, those who perform upon the Rabab, an exquisitely toned stringed-instrument, invented by the most famous musician of all time Tansen, who lived and worked at the court of Akbar.

At weddings in the Muzzaffargarh district, the dance called "Jhummir" is a great favourite. Its performances are not strictly relegated to these occasions only, for with variations it is danced anywhere and at any time when numbers of people are gathered together for any form of celebration

whatsoever. There are three main types of 'Jhummir', each of which has a different mood, and is therefore suited to different occasions, by reason of its predominating mood. It is a simple dance based on the usual circle, and accompanied by musicians and the clapping of the hands of the dancers themselves. The time patterns though not the movements of the dance, have developed some intricacy; and by virtue of these, a man is lightly esteemed if he cannot acquit himself well at a "Jhummir" performance. The girls even have a line or so of doggerel with which to jeer at those who are too clumsy to cut an agile figure in the "Jhummir" dance. It runs—

"Na Jhummir na tari
Na ajai mukh te darhi"

which means more or less "You cannot dance Jhummir, nor clap your hands. You cannot even grow a beard on your face." Although these "Jhummir" dances are now so well known in the Punjab, they are Baluchi in origin and the Baluchi camel-drivers are even now great exponents of them.

The Khattak community perform large-scale dances of a warlike nature around bonfires. Sometimes as many as two hundred men take part in a performance, and these may include even the dignified elders from Pathan villages, yelling at the top of their voices, and abandoning themselves to the wild fury of the dance. This reaches such a pitch that the piper and drummer who provide the music; themselves join the dancing, playing their instruments at the same time. The drummer is considered the most important factor in the success or otherwise of a Khattak dance party,

and the performers often refuse to dance if they consider the drummer insufficiently skilled in the reproduction of the intricate and high speed rhythms required by their dances. The dancers resolve themselves into duets of sword-play, which in turn give way to furious brandishing and twirling of weapons, performed with a great display of skill, not unworthy of comparison with a display of fencing; then the partners fall back into the general circle of the dancers and whirl and spin about their bonfire which is constantly fed with fresh supplies of wood and oil, and throws a lurid glare over the dynamic scene. In the intervals of the dance, intervals necessitated by the extreme expenditure of energy demanded in its performance, individual dancers come forward into the circle, and give a display of most dexterous feats of sword-play, the result of long years of assiduous practice. A Khattak dance party is the preliminary to a feast, at which sheep and goats are slaughtered, and the mutton is roasted whole and eaten on the scene of the festivities.

In the hill State of Chamba, dancing is a favourite pastime among the agricultural inhabitants of these upland valleys. These dances are danced for their own sake, not being dependent for their performance on any religious feast or seasonal celebration. Men and women never dance together, but each sex has its own set of dances, those of the women being known as "Ghorai". In these the women form two circles, round which they dance, with slow graceful gestures, swaying the body half-way round to the left or right at each step in an easy manner, raising the arms alternately above the head, or sweeping them towards the ground with sinuous movements of the

wrists and fingers. The dancers accompany themselves with songs, sometimes lyrical, sometimes a metrical setting to some old legend. The two groups sing alternately, the second repeating the words of the first group.

The dancing of the men has not the same grace, being vigorous, and often even boisterous in character. Sometimes a dancer continues to spin wildly round and round, regardless of the form of the dance, until from sheer fatigue and giddiness he falls to the ground. At all the village fairs, dancing is an essential part of the procedure, and among the men this often means the consumption of much village distilled liquor, which further detracts from the dignity of the entertainment. The townspeople of Chamba do not indulge in any form of dancing, and tend to regard it as a decadent pastime unfit for any but the least cultured of village folk.

Pangi dance is a charming folk-dance of Himachal Pradesh, danced by women with the accompaniment of a "Dholak" (drum played by a male). The dance is not connected with any festival in particular but is usually performed for the sheer pleasure of it. Scaling the heights with heavy loads on their backs, these people walk slowly. So they dance slowly.

There are many other dances found throughout the villages of the Punjab, differing little from each other, and none of them having attained any high degree of development. They are the simple expression of a simple peasantry, and consist of usual variations of the basic pattern in which men or women dance round a circle, either clapping the hands, stamping the feet, or accompanying themselves with the singing of local legends set

to, an easy melody. Among these are those known as "Dhris", "Sammi", "Lodhi", "Bhangra" and "Dhamal". They are danced at fairs, weddings, and for no reason at all, any evening on any village green where a few joyful-spirited youths or maidens chance to have gathered together.

The "Bhangra" can rightly be called the national community dance of the menfolk of the Punjab. Of the same status is the "Giddha", a dance of the Punjabi women. The former is very popular for its vigorous movements. Though danced traditionally on the occasion of Baisakhi, after the harvest, yet it is danced at every time whenever there is an occasion for joy and happiness. "Bhangra" is the dance of purest joy for the peasant when he is delighted to see bountiful crop.

The dance number continues for hours till the performers are exhausted. If one of the dancers is tired, he falls out from the ring and his place is occupied by another, who is waiting outside the ring, though joining the group in the chorus singing. A drummer first starts the song by beating with sticks on a drum and the dancers dance with singing with occasional yells of "Walleh, Walleh". The drummer stands in the middle while the dancers move around him. At first their movement is slow, conforming only to light stepping, but gradually the whole body moves aggravating the tempo and very soon there is vigorous sinuous movements. They go round and round in a circle bending forward, straightening, moving towards the right and to the left, hopping on one leg and raising their hands above their heads, waiving them there. In case they carry sticks they wield them over their heads or rest them on their shoulders and keep their hands hanging on the sticks.

Very often the dancers carry long and heavy sticks with metal hoops, circles and thick-headed nails. While dancing they raise them high and bring them down upon the ground, all together in unison. One of the dancers come forward from the ring and with the right palm of the hand cupped and placed at the back of the right ear and the left hand raised up and sometimes produced forward, sings a couplet of a love theme at the pitch of his voice. A few words at the end of the couplet are repeated by the rest of the dancers, and then all of them begin to dance with the accompaniment of the drum. One by one almost all the dancers get an opportunity to sing by turns.

The dress of the dancers is very colourful. They put on a "Tahmat", or a piece of coloured or check cloth, flowing "Kurtas" (loose Indian shirts), and "Patkas" (coloured turbans). Over the "Kurtas" they put on a green, red or blue vest with "Jari" stars embedded on it. Sometimes they put on "Nagra" shoes with shining flowers carved on them.

The orchestra of the "Bhangra" comprises of a big drum, "Dholak", which is played by means of two sticks, one big and another small, the thick and the big stick is called "Khoonti", and the thin and the small one is known as "Chhari". The thick stick is being used first in order to announce the beginning of the dance. Then the "Chhari" is used. The other instruments are a reed pipe, commonly known as "Alghoza" and a pair of big iron tongs, called "Chimta".

Most of the "Bhangra" songs deal with lovers and beloved, though they embrace all other subjects, including the everyday life of the village.

folk. The following is a couplet where the lover is charmed by the beauty of his beloved.

"Ran naha ke chhapar chon nikli,
Sulfe di lat wargi."

After taking her bath she comes out of the tank and looks like the flame of the "Chilum" of the "Hukka".

The following are a few couplets dealing with love:

"Dhere, dhere, dhere,
There were piar dian gallan
Hon Santan de dere."

Our love is the topic at the hermitage of the village saint.

"Meri rus gai jhan jaran wali,
Mere bhane rab rusia."

My beloved, who wears tinkling anklets, is angry with me, and it seems that God has forsaken me.

"Meri lagdi kise na wekhi,
Tutdi noon jag janda."

When we began to love each other it was a secret. But since we are separated everyone is aware of it.

A few of the other couplets deal with the everyday life of the peasant. The following couplet describes the struggle and tribulation of the farmer:

"Jata teri noon buri,
Hal chad ke chhari noon jana."

The farmer's life is very hard, when he stops

ploughing for the day, the first duty that he has to perform is to cut fodder for the cattle.

"Jat shahan noon khanghoore mare
Kankan nisiriyan."

The wheat crop is ready and the peasant, while passing by the shop of the village money-lender, coughs challengingly.

The vital "Giddha" dance is performed by rural womenfolk of the Punjab. It is dance of merriment and joy. A girl plays on a small "dholki" (drum). Sometimes she strikes on the wood of the small drum by means of two small pieces of stones and leads the chorus songs. A group of maidens follows the strain and dance in a ring fashion around the drummer. They sing, "Enter our village too, Oh Giddha dance. Oh do not move away by the outer path beyond the village." The dancers clap and also strike on the palms of the dancers who are opposite to one another. In this way they move. They start slowly but as the dance progresses, the beat of the drum becomes faster, so also the feet of the dancer. They sing several songs one after the other.

The dancers put on "Lahanga" or loose coloured skirts, coloured "Kurtas" for ladies and "Dopattas" or veils, which are of various hues. They also bedeck themselves with rural silver heavy ornaments and have a single braid of hair.

Mostly the composers of songs sung in Giddha dances are women, and these poetesses describe the innumerable problems of their community. But most of the songs deal with love. The following are extracts from some of the popular "Giddha" songs:

"We men teri u nand di weera,
Juti uton hag saria."

The newly wedded wife expresses her love to her husband by saying that she has dedicated herself to him, who is brother of her 'Nand' (husband's sister. 'Nand' is a relation for contempt). Even then she will be glad to sacrifice the whole world to satisfy his small desire.

"Doabe di men jami jaice,
Jangal which wiyahi,
Desh which hunee koonj men bhainon,
Jang noon giya mera mahi
Hardam neer wa wichon nainan,
Aaon dee chith na payee,
Mur pao si pahiya we,
Men jindari hol ghumaice,
Chunj teri kalia kawan
Sone nal marhawan
Ja akheen nire dhol sipahi noon,
Nit men aunian pawan,
Khabran liya kawan we
Tennon ghio di choori pawan."

I was born in the plains of Doaba, and was carried to the jungle of Malwa, where I am lonely. I am like a duck separated from its companions. I feel more lonely, because my husband has gone to serve in the battle as a soldier. I always shed tears because my husband, since he left home, has not written any letter, nor he has informed me when he will be back home. Oh my soldier, please come back home. I am ready to lay down my life for you. Oh, black crow, if you carry a message to my husband I will cover you with gold. Please go and tell him that

I am waiting for him anxiously. I will give you "Churi" (a sweetmeat prepared with flour, sugar and wheat).

The village maidens are so enamoured with "Giddha" dances that they sing,

"Mar jan Sinh Sabaheey,
Jinhan Giddhe pindan chouband keete."

May the Singh Sabhawalas die, because they have stopped in the village the performance of "Giddha" dancing.

A few of the other subjects in the "Giddha" songs are :

"Na men parhi Gurmukhi,
Na bethi saan dere,
Nit nautian main joran bolian
Bah ke mote nahere,
Was nahin kujh mere,
Melne nach lai ni,
Dede Shaunk de gere."

I neither received education in a school nor in the hermitage of a mendicant. Still I compose new Giddha songs when the sun is to rise or to set. My songs are the result of inspiration over which I have no control. Oh guest, please enjoy a few rounds of "Giddha."

"Sade pind de munde dekh lao,
Jeon tahli de pawe,
Kanidar munda banhade chadre,
Paunchi nal suhawe,
Dudha kashnia banhde safe,
Jeo udea kabootar jawe.
Malmal de kurte sohande,
Jeon bagla tala which nahawe,

Giddha panode mundian di,
Sifat kari an kawē."

The boys of our village are stout and strong like the logs of Sheesham wood. Their dress comprises of "Chaddars" (wrappers) with fine borders, "paonchee" ornaments and turbans of light violet colour. The ends of the turbans flutter like the flying pigeons, when swayed by light breeze. Their 'Kurtas' are like cranes taking bath in a tank. It is not possible to describe how beautiful the boys are when they perform the "Giddha" dance.

"Sun nikuri ye nachau waliay,
Tera punia ton roop sawaya,
Which kurian de toon panwen pailan,
Tainoon nachua keehne sikhaya,
Abhnan non toon aidan lagdi,
Jeon birchh di thandi chhaya,
Saung nal nach lae ni Giddhe,
Da mausam aya."

You are more handsome than the full moon. You dance like a peacock among the dancing girls. Who has taught to dance so marvellously? Your dance is soothing to everybody and every one feels as if taking rest under the shade of a very big tree on a hot day. Dance with glee, as this is the time for dancing "Giddha."

"Phagan maheen minh pae janda,
Lagda kareereen bata.
Sarhon noon taan phul pae jande,
Chholean noon pawe pataka.
Shaung nal jat Giddha paonde.
Rab sbhanan da rakha,
Basanti phull we,
Aake de ja jhaka."

In the month of "Phagun" rains stop. "Kareer", a wild bush, brings forth its fruits. The grain pods burst with a bang. Farmers are fond of Giddha dancing, because God is the protector of everyone. Oh, my beloved, you are beautiful like a Basant (spring) flower. Come and let me see you at least once.

Among the inhabitants of Sindh, the performances at private houses of professional dancing women is much patronised, even as it was in the days when the Amirs kept their lavish and extravagant court there. Now-a-days, however, this form of entertainment seems to hold greater popularity among the Mussalman population than among the Hindus. The Sindhi dancing women, though belonging to the courtesan class, are strikingly good-looking, and any large party is considered incomplete without an exhibition of their talent. In the days when the Amirs held sway over this desert province, their durbars were attended by the rough, unpolished crowds of Pathan and Baluchi chieftains, and there is a tradition today in the bazaars of Hyderabad, the erstwhile capital, that at these durbars, the exquisite dancing of these women, and the lilting notes of the Persian lyrics which they sang, so enchanted all present, that court etiquette was completely forgotten, and with no respect for the princely presence, the swaggering Pathans, and the rough truculent Baluchis, and even armed retainers of the royal household all jostled each other as they thronged for positions in the Hall of Audience, from where they could better enjoy the performance.

It is the descendants of these enchantresses who comprise the body of Sindh's dancers today, and although there are no longer royal courts to patronise

them, they are still able to accumulate great wealth from the patronage of the rich landed aristocracy at whose social functions they still dance with undiminished grace and delicacy.

Among the Hindus of Upper Sindh, Bhagat performances are also immensely popular. At these, members of the Bania community dance and sing religious songs, to the beating of drums, never tiring for hours as they go through hymn after hymn, in honour of their gods.

The Baluchis, still largely nomadic, and knowing nothing of intellectual joys, are extremely fond of the dance as a form of pastime wherever they come together in large numbers on any festive occasion. Their dances are necessarily purely social or warlike in character, as these people have little cultural background to provide a rich deposit of myth and legend from which to draw themes for dance dramas, and since they are a Mussalman race, they have not, like the Hindu peasantry, a huge pantheon of divine heroes and gods, whose multifarious activities can be recalled in song and dance celebrations. These facts have certainly restricted the development of the art into anything comparable with the dance forms of other provinces, particularly in the South, where the dance of the people, fed by the rich store of religious myth and legend of an ancient race, little influenced by outside forces, has given not only the dance dramas of the Kathakali type, but has led to the development of the highly stylised and intricate symbolism of the classical Bharata Natya.

Meanwhile, however, the Baluchi, innocent of these considerations and any awareness of his own limitations, has continued through the ages to throw himself wholeheartedly into the enjoyment

of pure movement, movement performed for its own sake, and enhanced by the rhythms set by drum and cymbal, sometimes accompanied by song, sometimes merely by clapping of the hands of the dancers. At wedding parties the Jhummir dances already described are almost always performed. This is perhaps the only dance existing among the Baluchis calling for skill of any kind in its execution.

Among some sections of the community, it used to be the custom for men and women to dance together, but about twelve years ago the Mullahs pronounced the practice to be unlawful, and ascribed to it an earthquake that occurred at that time. Since then mixed dancing is very rare.

In the State of Las Bela, the favourite form of dance is a survival of some old war dance in which the original weapons have been long since replaced by sticks. These are beaten together with a great deal of shouting and stamping, as forty or fifty burly tribesmen revolve in a great circle about two drummers and a piper who form their orchestra.

CHAPTER VII

UTTAR PRADESH

Brata or ritual dances prevail throughout this State among the women of every village. These are sometimes connected with the ceremonies attendant on the great *puja* days, or even at some private rite of invocation, but more generally they are performed during those rites by which the exorcism of disease-bringing deities is effected. Most of the major epidemic diseases known to the villager in the tropics have their presiding deities, and when there is imminent danger of an area being affected, the women gather to offer sacrifice and prayer to the deity involved, after which they perform the ritual dances which are supposed to propitiate the malevolent intent of the goddess, and thereby avert the threatened scourge. The *Shitala puja* has already been mentioned in connection with the similar performance found among the women of Bengal, Shitala being the goddess who presides over small-pox. At the *puja* ceremony, the women loosen their hair, and with flowing tresses, dance around the shrine, wailing the chorus—

*"Jhabar jhule Kali ke,
Jai Sammaya Mai ke."*

This is probably the result of some urge, which impels an ignorant peasantry to strive to cope in some way, with a terror which they, with their

lack of knowledge even of the elementary principles of hygiene, are powerless to control or lessen.

All along the banks of the river Jumna, sacred to the memory of the cowherd god, Krishna, one meets with a wealth of folk-dance which commemorates in song and movement the most popular theme in all Hinduism, the divine love of Krishna and Radha, and the legends connected with the childhood and youth of the god among the shepherds and '*gopikas*' (shepherdesses). Mathura and Brindaban are the places where these celebrations of the devotees of Krishna reach their greatest intensity, and therefore their highest development. The most well-known dances are those of the *Rasa-Lila* series, known wherever Krishna is worshipped. These are all depictions of the playtime of the hero's youth and early manhood, and the dances are well developed in the sense that the movement is complex, and the miming has reached a high degree of artistry and technical skill. On account of the popularity of these performances, the traditional instruments of the orchestra are gradually being ousted by a set of tablas, (drums requiring much skill and musical knowledge to be played at all well) and the ubiquitous harmonium, which has unfortunately gained such popularity in this country during the last century, although it is so ill-suited to the adequate interpretation of Indian music. Much of the foot-work of these dances somewhat resembles that of the classical Kathak style of dancing, though it is, of course, necessarily less stylised and conventionalised than that to be found in classic forms.

In these districts there is also great dance activity during the holy festival of 'Holi'. These dances are mainly performed by women, and are

more inclined to become dance-games than mere dances. This does not mean to say that the quality of the dancing is not of a high standard; often it is most graceful and intricate; but this 'Holi' or 'Dol-Jatra' is of its nature a joyous festival, and is celebrated with much merry-making, which involves the liberal squirting of brightly coloured water on all and sundry, and the throwing of red, yellow or green dust. The dancers, as they perform, are armed with the requisite syringes, from which they discharge their gay ammunition, and the whole atmosphere is one of light-hearted revelry.

Just after the rains break, the famous 'kajri' dances come into season. They are performed to the accompaniment of the delightful 'Jhula' lyrics, these being swing songs. Village maidens express their joy at the end of the scorching cruel summer, by swinging and singing out of doors under the mango trees, while others of their party dance in the newly refreshed air, half intoxicated by the smell of the rain on the wet earth, and the damp grass springing to a fresh life and greenness after the terrible months that precede the coming of the monsoon.

The professional dancing girls of this region have at their command a repertoire that is both varied and of a high standard of skill and beauty. Their technique resembles closely that of the Kathak school, and to the eyes of the uninitiated may seem to possess greater grace and lovelier posing. This is natural, for the Kathak dances are meant to be appreciated by a more cultured audience, and their appeal is to the intellect as much as the senses. The appeal of these lesser dances is of a purely sensual nature, and though lacking the

spiritual element so essential to great art, is by no means primitive or vulgar.

Maud Allen, the well-known dancer, saw an exhibition by some of these dancing girls, and remarked, "I thought I could dance but compared with your girls, I know nothing."

Charles Doyley gives the following account of a dancing woman of Lucknow: "It should be understood that the dance women of India pique themselves entirely on the gracefulness of their positions and motions. They have no variety of steps, the feet being kept parallel and close; one foot advancing or moving only a few inches, and the other always following it. This, however, is done with remarkable exactness as to time, which, on all occasions, is regulated by the instruments played by men attached to the set."

Prince Victor of Cooch Behar writes: "For the most difficult feat which the nautch girls have to perform is the walk. The perfect walk is the *ne plus ultra* of the nautch, and to watch a 'nautch-wali' glide effortlessly across the floor is the personification of art."

The dress of the North Indian nautchwali consists of a skirt of enormous width, which is worn gathered tightly about the narrow waist, and thence swings in wide and endless folds down to the ankles. The hem of the skirt is embroidered with rows and rows of work in gold and silver thread.

A tightly fitting and very short blouse, known as a 'choli' is worn above this, the choli being so short that there is always a gap between the waistband of the skirt and the hem of the 'choli'. Tucked into the waist of the skirt, and thence draped about the head and shoulders is a length of filmy gauze-like material usually richly embroidered

along its edges with gold and silver. This is called the 'Dopatta.' This gorgeous costume has its beauty enhanced by the quantities of jewellery worn by the dancing girls, in the form of bangles, anklets, ear-rings, necklaces, etc.

"Nautanki" is a popular dance which is prevalent throughout the State of Uttar Pradesh. The melodies accompanying the songs as well as the dances are derived from forms familiar to the mass. The themes are either based on the struggle between the forces of good and evil from the religious epics or on heroic deeds from historic traditions, such as Allah and Udal. Very often the "Nautanki" players deal with day-to-day problems of social life, or with patriotic themes such as the martyrdom of Bhagat Singh.

Among the simpler sections of society, are dances which are the strict property of particular castes. Thus the Ahirs (milkmen), Kahars (menials), Chamars (leather-workers), and Pasis (scavengers) each have their own particular dances, which are not performed by members of any other caste. Of these, those of the Ahirs and Chamars have attained a higher development than any others, and contain material of much interest to the collector of folk-lore and folk-art, besides great possibilities of further development.

The Ahir dance, which has no other accompaniment, vocal or instrumental, than that of the *dholak and kansi* (drum and cymbals) has a wealth of original foot-work; which calls to mind the disciplined stepping of the fencer or sword acrobat. The dance is only performed within the Ahir community at the time of births and marriages. The performers wear a tight knicker, the rest of the body being left naked except for the adorn-

ment of armlets and necklaces. Instead of the usual anklets, bands of little brass bells are bound about the thighs, and the jingling of these adds emphasis to the time-patterns of the dance. The Ahir dance recalls the past history of the clan as a warring race.

The following two "Biraha" songs to the accompaniment of which the Ahirs perform their ballets, show how poetic and artistic their compositions are. The word "Biraha" is not derived from "Viraha" or separation, but from the word "Rahi", meaning traveller. The villagers have to traverse long distances on foot, so they sing songs to break the monotony of the journey, and that they should not feel exhausted, and also as they are engaged in singing they think that it has taken a short time to cover the distance. The emotion of a "Biraha" song does not generally carry the sentiment of separation, but of chivalry.

'Mohan roop banay chalen Shri Kishan
chalen bun ke lilahari,
Jai barsane hank dehiyon koī lila godawain
sabhahin Brajanari,
Bolo sakhi tum kahanwan se awat kahanwan
ahai sasural tunhari,
Kunjanpur se awat hai Mathura ahai sasurar
hamari,
Ahanai jo haal sunain sakhiyan tab naram
kalai pakarke Mohanka anta ke upar
lai gayen charhai.
Anta ke upar charhai Manmohan lai Mohini
mun men muskai,
Derh gajai ka ghunghat khenchein thumki-u-
thumki chalein Banwari,
Mathe ke dauri utar dharain tabain apahin
baithi gayen Girdhari,

Bole sakhi wey hasin sakhian sun le sajani ek
 baat hamari,
 Ek main godan Rani Devaka ke jo bus Devaki
 ke param piyari,
 Dusre godai hain Kansa mahal men jekre
 paun rehka bhari,
 Teeser naam sunao sakhiyan tohre dik ke
 godan ayee,
 Etne jo haal sunen sakhiyan we hansi ke
 dunao bhuj dihen pasari.
 Othain ke Ram ke nam likhain gare beech
 likhain Girwar Girdhari,
 Mathe pai Suraj ke jyoti likhain ankhiyan pai
 likh den Chandarma bhari,
 Burari pe Govinda Govind likh aur phuphn
 pai likhain Shri Krishna Murari,
 Bolo sakhi tum kya deho yao weyeen antar
 beech likhen Banwari,
 Haar debain hajaran ke dulari tilari hansuli
 dar bhari
 Champakali tirvali dehiyaon nake ke besar
 debaun utari:
 Bahan pai bahan dharain Brajmohan chamaki
 uthain Brikbhan ke dulari.
 Tum hamse chharchhanda karti hawao hum
 tohre paon dhowan ayee,
 Sur ke sham daras kab dabaun been Banwari
 tarafai nari nari."

Lord Krishna, on whose presence the jungle becomes beautiful, moves (disguised as a woman) with His divine magnificence. He shouts whether any girl wants to have her hands tattooed by Him. (The girls ask Him): "Tell friend, where are you coming from and where is your father-in-law's place? (He replies): "I am coming from Kunjanpur and Mathurapur is my father-

in-law's place." As soon as the women hear this they take him to the upper storey of the house holding his tender wrist. On reaching the first floor Krishna smiles, and walks modestly after hiding His face with His veil of one and half yards long. He sits down and keeps the basket from His head on to the ground. He says, "Dear friends, please listen to one word of mine. I tattooed for the first time Queen Devaka, the most beloved of Devaki, and for the second time in the castle of the indomitable Kansa. For inscribing the tattoo marks for the third time I have come to your house." On hearing this the ladies laugh and produce their hands forward. Krishna writes the name of "Rama" on their lips, "Girwar Girdhari" on the middle of their necks, the "Lustre of Sun" on the forehead, "Moon" on the eyes, "Govinda, Govinda" on the navel and "Krishna Murari" on the chin. (All the names are of Krishna.) He asks, "Tell me friends, what will you give me for writing "Banwari" (another name of Krishna) in your hearts?" (The ladies reply): "We will give necklace worth thousands, garlands of two or three gold strings, heavy "Hansuli" (a thick heavy necklace). We will put off our "Champakali", "Tirvali" (kinds of necklaces), and nose-rings for you. "Brijmohan keeps his hand on the hand of the daughter of Brikbhan (Radhika), who is flabbergasted, and says "You have come to play tricks with me? I have come to wash your feet."

The women suffer without Banwari and ask, Oh, the Blue coloured God of the Universe, when will you be present before us?

The following song shows their sense of

patriotism. The Ahirs dance to the accompaniment of this song as well:

*Dafa chaulis ka mahina din Sawan ka roj
Bigar gayen Sivraji logan laike jhanda nishan
Jayke chhapen kila ke phatak tab Saheb ghabran
Kyon to bhagen purub pachim our Kilha churh
gayen ban.*

*Jayke pahuuchen Daraganj khare rahen Dewan
Rajghat bund kihen pukke pul pur kihen paigan
Jayke pahunchen Jhansi ke andar mare halla luti
lagen Banian ke dukan*

*Aur Banen royen dhanken Satua pisan
Tob lei daurein bhagen Bania dihen tattar khaskan
Bhagau bhagau humri jan na bachihen paran
Pahunch gaya jub Bunk gharawa tub Saheb
ghabran*

*Tikkus colluttor us ka kanpen ubnu buchihan
paran*

*Kat dihen kupra ka guthria bare bare balwan
Khanya akhanata aska danken jus ke andhi tuphan
Jayke pahunchen apne gharwa, khari rahi kone men
dulahinwa ghutkun men muskan*

*Bana rahe more rajau ke lan kapra ke than
Hamahun pahirab chutki chunaria sainya bhure
liao chutke chunaria*

*Karbai sorahau singar Durvasa ka mohar
Sainya jhum jhum kai gaubai ham Kajaria
Tabtai mach gai hahakar*

*Inayet sun gayen thanedar
Jaisai savika chhapi lihen moharia
Keu sowat ba gurwar keu dankat ba denrwar
Kitne bhagai lagen jondhri bujria*

*Sami ham na paharab chutki chunaria
Keu pere pur churh ke rowein keu Gangaji ke
manawain.*

*Sainya ub ki buch jaihain tohka
Phulai ki dalia chuhraubai
Tab to sabka mun dola Kunwadi se bhagen Bhola.
Chukhmundi buch gayen Raghunath, Katka pakar
gayen Bholanath*

*Jekre hanthei men sohat ba hanthkaria
Sainya hum na paharab nath chutki chunariya
Sainya agi lug gai chutki chunariya men.
Jaisai sukhai ghama os, waisai sukh gayen Bharose
Jaisai chuchukai lukuha aam, waisai chuchuk gayen
Jairam*

*Jaisai chunarin lagain aag piya sawain bundi
khan (khana)*

*Tab tai much gai hahakar jubsai kata lain ka tar.
Goli chul gai Katra ke katcheharia men
Sami agin lug ga chutki chunarian men.*

On a day in the month of 'Sravan' when Section 144 was promulgated the Swarajists became spirited and came out holding the national flags.

They laid a siege on the Fort and then the Sahib became restless. Some ran towards the East and some to the West and others ascended on the Fort like arrows.

They reached Daraganj where the Daroga was standing. They closed Rajghat and gave a clarion call from the cemented bridge.

They went inside Jhusi and began to shout and loot the shops of the Banias. The wives of the Banias began to weep and to cover Ata and Satua. In the meantime the Banias closed their shops by removing the 'Tattar' which was made of bamboo sticks.

"Run away, run away, my beloved, you will be perished", cried the Bania's wife.

When they reached the Bank premises, the

Sahib, who was inside, was perturbed. The ticket-collector trembled and thought his life would not be saved.

These strong great men cut bales of cloth and like storm and cyclone scaled boundary walls.

They reached their respective homes. The wife was standing in a corner smiling within her veils. "May my lover live long, because he has brought big sheets of cloth. I will also put on the shining Chunari Sari (sari with prints of floral designs with multifarious colours). Oh, My Darling! Bring gaudy Chunari Saris in plenty. I will dress up sixteen times at the doors of Durvasa. (Durvasa, a sage, was well-known for his anger. The line means that even at this time of great calamity I will devote myself to toilet.) I will sing Kajri, my darling!"

By that time the panic spread everywhere. The Daroga by name Inayet heard of it. Everybody's house was surrounded. A few were in deep slumber; others were jumping over boundary walls, and still others were making their escape through 'Bajra' and 'Jondhri' fields.

"Darling, I will not wear gaudy Chunari Saris". Some of the womenfolk began to weep climbing on trees, and a few vowed before Gangaji. "If you save my darling this time, I will offer you bunches of flowers in a basket."

After a while everyone was pacified. Bhola fled from Kunwadeeh, Raghunath of Chakhmundi was saved and Bhola Nath residing at Katra was arrested.

On seeing the handcuffs of the beloved the woman says, "Darling, I will not put on the gaudy Chunari,—Let the Chunari be burnt."

Bharose was emaciated as the dew drops are

dried up by the rays of the Sun. Jairam became thin as the mangoes are spoilt being affected by "Lu" (warm winds at the time of summer).

"My Darling is going to serve in the prison, and may God burn the Chunari Sari."

By that time when the telegraph wires were cut, panic spread throughout, and there was firing in the District Courts of Katra.

"May God burn the shining and gaudy Chunari which my husband brought for me."

The dances of the Chamars are simple dramatic or operatic performances, freely interspersed with dance numbers rather than true dance performances. One may almost consider them as an early stage in the development of the comic opera. Very often, the stories, slight though they be, are based on the themes from the legends of the gods, and contain much scope for buffoonery and clowning. The somewhat coarse sense of humour of the dialogue is not without a subtle undercurrent of clever satire; and there is always much witty punning and word-play in the repartee of the clowns. The actual dancing is performed by this lighter element in the *dramatis personae*.

There is one form of dance, known specifically as the buffoon's dance, or Bhanr Nautch, which was formerly in great demand among the aristocracy of the Uttar Pradesh so much so, that a number of these buffoons were permanently employed as part of the household of the rich *nawabs* and landed gentry. There was never much in the art of these entertainers that could be considered as pure dance; it was rather a rhythmic exhibition of horse-play and foolery, with much exchange of witty repartee. This form of entertainment became so degenerate and coarse, that

there was not even sufficient wit left in its dialogue to justify its further continuance, so that now-a-days one rarely, if ever, hears of it.

A dance frequently to be seen throughout the countryside and sometimes just beyond the limits of the big towns too, is the Banjara dance. The Banjaras are a nomadic tribe, who eke out an existence by peddling wild honey, roots of medicinal plants and perfumes such as '*mriganabhi*', the essence extracted from the navel of a certain species of deer. Since these itinerant peoples have no permanent abode, they live in wretched tents, and while away the evening hours by dancing round their communal bonfire to the accompaniment of the *dhholak*. The women wear the *lahanga*, the beautifully swinging skirt worn so little in present-day India, the tight *choli*, or bodice, and a length of material which shrouds the head and shoulders, similar to that worn by the professional dancing girl, but of ordinary coarse material.

Wandering beggars accompanied by a little boy with a drum, often draw the attention of the less fortunate to their miserable condition by dancing at roadsides and in the gateways of private houses. Often they dance for the amusement of bands of village children if they think they can expect any reward in the form of food or money.

The hilly folks of the Uttar Pradesh have a rich store of folk-lore and dances. Particularly in the Tehri-Garhwal region the males dance with their fair sex the 'sword' dance. "*Chawliya*", which is very picturesque. They sing and dance with the accompaniment of '*Dholak*', '*Kansi*' and flutes. The male dancers brandish their swords and start with light steps, gradually the stepping becomes faster and faster and round and round

they go. The womenfolk follow them with nimble footsteps. Sometimes the men hold the women by their waists, one woman between two male members and they swing and sing and dance. The idea is of protecting the women and property from the invasion of other tribes.

The song has a novel idea. It narrates that how a demon is killed while trying to murder a new-born baby in the village. It recalls the episode of the slaying of the demon '*Kansa*' by Sri Krishna.

The costume of the dancers is very spectacular. The male dancers put on white long loose robes like '*Achkan*' up to the heels. There are strings to be tied up on the chest. The garments are full-sleeved with coloured pieces of spades, hearts, clubs and diamonds fixed on the shoulders, back and chest. Sometimes they put on white turbans or else white caps. There are sashes of variegated colours around the waist. The male dancers wear tight-fitting '*Pyjamas*' up to the heels.

The ladies wear white '*Lahangas*' frilled at the bottom, with deep green or deep blue full-sleeved velvet jackets flowing down up to the knees. They wear long silver necklaces with very big and heavy pendants at the middle with silver beads all around. The necklace is studded with round silver coin-like pieces. The nose ornament is hung down with small silver beads and it is also very big, covering the mouth and the chin. They use big and heavy bangles and ear-rings. The head is veiled and sometimes the head-dress consists of a silver chain around the head or the coiffeur. None of the dancers uses anklets. Their chorus song is melodious.

Sometimes these women dance with brass plates balancing them on their fingers, and at times these plates or "thalis" revolve on the fingers at a tremendous speed.

The Garhwali male dances are vigorous with sinuous movements. The dancers form a circle hand in hand and bend forward. They step forward and retrace their steps, singing a chorus, abusing the village headman for imposing fine and a tax.

The "Ghasiyari" dance, depicting the hard days of the grass-cutters, performed only by womenfolk, raising their hands up, mimicking the cutting of grass, is endlessly fascinating.

The "Chanchari" dance has popular appeal, because of the colourful costume of the dancers. The whole atmosphere is scented with rose and colour and echoes with the gay abandon of the dancers and their music and the thunderous applause of the audience. The dance is performed in a circle. One half of the circle is performed by men and the other by women. At the centre is the drummer with two assistants who play on quaint instruments alternately. The drummer, who is also the director of the dance, sings and directs the dancers according to the song. The audience goes into raptures over the subtlety and the rhythm of the dance and roars approval at regular intervals. The dance attracts a large crowd during fairs.

"Jhora" is a Kumaon dance. In it a very large number of men and women of all castes linking arms dance in a circle with simple steps. They stand, bend and sit down in unison.

The "Chhapeli" dance of the Kumaon hills is a duet performed by a lover and a beloved.

The female dancer holds a mirror in her left hand and a colourful handkerchief in the right, and the male dancer, while dancing, plays on a "Khanjari" (small drum). The female dancer is profusely garlanded with wooden beads, big ear-tops and rings and thick heavy bangles. There is a triangular tiara on the head. She puts on a long flowing skirt, a green or blue full-sleeved jacket and a "Kardhani" or an ornament for the waist. The male dancer generally puts on a "churidar pyjama", singlet or a multicoloured shirt and a cap. He ties round his neck a handkerchief.

Throughout the whole State "Jagar" is prevalent. This dance is performed by a particular group of people, who are regarded as experts in driving out evil spirits, "Bhowani Mai".

The small polyandrous community of the Jaunsars, living on the borders of Garhwal and Himachal Pradesh, have retained many rich folk-dances. Among them special mention should be made of "Jadda" and "Jhainta" dances, which are enacted on festive occasions. These dances are performed by men and women together with abandon. The remnant of early war dance, now in vogue, is the "Thora" dance which is performed by men only holding swords to the accompaniment of big "Nagaras" (drums) played by sticks.

CHAPTER VIII

MADHYA PRADESH, MADHYA
BHARAT, RAJASTHAN AND
MAHARASHTRA

There are many types of dance entertainment extant in this region, including the primitive pastime of the aboriginal tribes, the sophisticated grace of the professional dancing girl, the seasonal festivities of the low caste Hindu communities, and the ritual performances in the temples, at the singing of the *bhajans* (religious songs).

The *bhajan* performances are not essentially dance performances, but the participants in the singing of the religious hymns become to be carried away by an emotional frenzy, always augmented by the hypnotism of the drums, that they are unable to remain still, but jump from the ground to posture and dance before the deity. This devotional fervour attains an excess of fanatical enthusiasm at the times of the great festivals, particularly among the members of the lower castes, for whom religion is less a matter of the intellect and spirit, and rather more of a conglomeration of superstitions and emotional fervours.

Diwali, the festival of lights in honour of the goddess Lakshmi, is celebrated with many singing and dancing parties by the lower castes. The people of Betul district have a dance known as Dhandar, which they perform on the fifth day after Diwali. For this they erect a shed or pavilion,

and in the shelter thus afforded, the men stand in two rows, facing each other, and move backwards, forwards and sideways, beating together two sticks to mark the timing of their movements, and singing romantic lyrics. This simple show always attracts crowds of witnesses from the surrounding hamlets, and the performance goes on during the whole night, during which time home-distilled spirit freely flows to maintain the waking energy of both performers and spectators. After the dance is over, dawn is ushered in by a display of horse-play, given by young men attired as women.

During the same festival of Diwali, the milkmen caste, the Ahirs, perform their 'Madai' dances, also of not very reputable character. They dress up in the most gaily coloured garments available, and decorate their head-dresses with peacock feathers, and their persons with enormous quantities of ornament in the form of cowrie shell necklaces, brass armlets and anklets, made of hollow brass tubing filled with little pebbles in order that they may produce as much noise as possible. Thus attired, bands of Ahirs wander from house to house among the better class Hindus, and there dance and sing their somewhat crude songs in expectation of monetary reward. They also visit the weekly markets held in the vicinity.

The village of Wardha is wellknown for the number of dances with which it celebrates its seasonal festivities. These are of a primitive kind, and frequently allow free play for crude burlesquing and coarse humour. In one of their dances, a man dressed as a girl narrates while dancing the history of a woman's life, from childhood, through adolescence, domestic tasks, and motherhood to

old age. This is generally considered most amusing according to the undeveloped number of the peasant mind.

On most festivals the inhabitants of Wardha, as they dance, take arms in a long line, moving to and fro as one of their number sings a song suitable to the occasion, the others following and beating together small sticks to mark the time and adapting their extempore movements to suit the rhythm.

In this region are many of the aboriginal tribes. They too have their dances, many of which are not so primitive as may be supposed. The Gonds have a dance known as "Karma", in which both men and women take part, making rows opposite each other, while the musicians playing on a kind of drum called a 'timki' sit between them on the ground. The dance is graceful, and well regulated with measured steps, which are very correctly performed. Dancing continues throughout a whole night, watched by crowds of spectators who gather from many miles around on these occasions. While they dance, the performers sing love-songs, one row answering the other, the echo of their voices floating for miles on the still night air.

The Gonds have dances like "Jhumar". The dances are accompanied with love songs and those bearing social themes. They have their stilt dances, which have come into vogue as a result of covering long distance by using stilts in a short time in the marshy lands and trackless jungles.

The tribal people of Bastar have dances akin to those of the Gonds. They have religious dances as well invoking the goddesses Shakti and Danteshwari of Magha "Dewari", and in the month of Chaitra "Chait Danda" dances.

"Beej Putni" dance is performed by them when they sow seeds in the fields, "Godo" dance in the month of Shravan and "Gonda" dance to appease the Rain God. The last mentioned dance continues for the whole of the night.

The tribal youths also dance "Lakshmi Jagar" to please the goddess of wealth. This particular dance is performed for nearly a month. It is danced throughout the night only. At daybreak the dancers disperse to reassemble in the evening. An image of goddess Lakshmi is installed under "Shemal" tree. The young girls adorn the image with fresh flowers from the jungles. From distant rural areas young people of both the sexes come and dance together around the image.

Only men take part in the "Dagla" dance of the Bhils, whereas both the sexes participate in the "Pali" dance.

Amongst the Banjaras, the women do not, as a rule, join the men in dancing, but they have their separate items. The menfolk dance the "Langi" dance during the rainy months of Shravan, and on Rakhi Poornima (when the sister ties down a thread on the hand of her brother for his long life), and on Kali Amavasya day. These dances are accompanied by songs of heroism, either of Prithviraj or other heroes of the land.

The "Ghero" dance is performed with group of men having their hands on each other's shoulders. The dancers in "Kamchino" item carry others on their shoulders. The "Phag" dance is done by them holding swords during the Holi days. This dance provides some humour as a man dressed up like a woman dances in the middle. The singers squat on the ground and clap their hands while singing.

The womenfolk of the Banjaras perform a dance having a series of pitchers full of water one on the other balanced on their hands. This is known as "Lota" dance. They have another group dance which is usually called "Saundarya" (beauty) dance. In this particular dance they form two rows facing each other, and reach out and clasp hands, swaying back and forth and singing all the while.

The "Koli" dance of Maharashtra has taken several shapes in different parts of the land. Kolis are the fishing folks and have their "Koli" dance, either performed by men only or by both the sexes together. The fishermen stand in two rows holding miniature oars in their hands, moving in unison in imitation of the movement of rowing a boat. And thus swaying forwards and backwards they create the dramatic illusion of a boat tossing on the waves of the sea. The fisherwomen, who also stand in rows arms enlinked, advance towards the men.

There is also another form, which is known as the "Nakhavi Kolin" dance. This is a duet dance performed by a male and a female. The male is a Nakhavi or captain and the female is his wife, Kolin. The Kolin puts her left hand on the left hip and holds a kerchief by her right hand and then goes on swinging on either side with separated feet. The male dancer holds a glass in one hand and a bottle of liquor in the other, and at intervals pours down the liquid and offers it to the Kolin.

The third type is a humorous dance, known as Nakta or snub nosed. It is a trio where there is the snub nosed or Nakta and the Koli and his wife. The Nakta is the clown who provides laughter for the village audience especially the children. The Nakta puts on a mask.

The "Dahi Handi" (curd pot) or the "Dahi Kala" dance is performed in memory of Lord Krishna's well-known prank of stealing curd. This is observed on the day following Gokulashtami. On this day every house in the village places a pitcher full of curd hanging it at the outside wall of the house. A pitcher full of curd is also placed at the entrance of the village temple. The boys of the village go at first to the temple, break the pitcher and consume the curd, and then go to every house. In front of every house they make a sort of pyramid, small boys standing on the shoulders of the strong ones. Some of the boys stand on the ground making the first row, and a few stand on their shoulders making a second row. Then a small boy enacting as Krishna stands on the top of the two rows and thus reaches the hanging pot of curd. He breaks the earthen pitcher. Then there is a scramble to secure the broken pieces of the pitcher. The villagers cherish a belief that these pieces have the power of increasing the milk-supply in the area.

There are folk ballets and dance-dramas also. Maharashtra has Dasavatara and Bohada dance-dramas, in which the ten incarnations of the God and mythological episodes from the scriptures are enacted.

The physical culturists have borrowed from several folk dance items some of their movements and have adapted them in their exercises in the drive of "body beautiful" scheme. These are the "Lezim" (small mallet) and "Phungadi". In "Lezim" there is stepping, hopping, squatting and bending; and every movement is performed in perfect time with the strikes of the "Lezim", which is swung in four or eight counts, thus providing the

rhythmic accompaniment. In "Phungadi" the girls stand facing each other, cross their arms and join palms and leaning back with their feet together and their arms outstretched they whirl round as far as and as long as they can and then part exhausted. Of course the "Phungadi" had innumerable variations.

The "Dindi" dance is performed by men on Ekadashi day in Asarh or in Kartik, while going to the temple or carrying a flag with a figure of the Sun God, "Surya", or the monkey God, "Hanuman" on it. The participants generally fall in two rows facing one another. Mridanga (Drum) and Veena (a kind of string instrument) are played and the musical instrument players lead the procession. There is belief that "Dindi" dance opens the gate of Heaven.

The "Tipri" and "Goph" dances are performed holding two small coloured sticks, one in each hand, with the accompaniment of "Tabla" and cymbals. There are dances performed in honour of Gauri (Shiva's consort) and Ganapati (Ganesha). Those are known as "Cheuli" and "Jakhadi" dances. They are danced to the accompaniment of Mridanga and cymbals. The "Thakur" and "Katkari" dances are performed to the accompaniment of a "dhol" (big drum). In the "Tarapi" dances, "Tarapi" or a curved big brass flute is played. In the "Palkhi" dance the two dancers carry a "Palkhi" (palanquin) containing metal images, generally of local deities.

In Gwalior dancing and singing are the rich man's amusements, and are provided by the women of the professional class, who are hired to perform in the houses of the wealthy. Very often ordinary middle class members of society strive to

obtain the services of these sirens at the celebrations held in the family on the occasions of births and marriages, but since their fees are very high, they perform but little outside the social circle of the rich landlords and the aristocracy.

In Amjeer the Jats hold a fair every year in the month of July to commemorate the valorous deeds of their ancient hero, Teja. Both the sexes remain awake throughout the whole of the night preceding the fair, dancing and singing the praises of their deified hero and bearing to his shrine offerings of cooked rice, barley and fruits.

Among the Marwaris dancing has always been a popular pastime among the women. They have many varieties of folk dances in their repertoire, and their activities are mostly centred in Bikaner.

The ladies of Bikaner, Jalore, Pali and Shekhavati dance the "Ghumer" dance, putting on their colourful skirts, and dancing in circles, clapping with small sticks or wooden swords. The dance is performed on the Navratra and the Gangaur day. Its display is extremely attractive and full of rhythm and charm.

"Jhumer" dance is a group dance, in which the women put on bead ornaments and flowers and dance at the fairs of Jagdishji at Alwar, Teej at Jaipur, Matrikundi at Udaipur, and at several other fairs held in different places.

In the "Dhola Maru" dance the romantic love episode of "Dhola", the lover, and "Maru", the beloved are enacted to the accompaniment of songs and drums.

The "Dandiya-Ras Nritya" is a popular dance. It is performed by a group of dancers, dancing in a circle and holding long sticks. The drummer

takes his position in the centre of the circle hanging the drum round his neck. He gives the rhythm of the dance and leads. The dance begins with slow shuffling steps, but as the drum is beaten faster the steps grow swifter. The dance goes on round and round, arms waving, feet moving in step and in between the dancers there is the exclamation of "Ho, Ho" to heighten the emotional tempo. This dance expresses the feeling of joy and satisfaction at the conclusion of one season, of the successful life of toil by the sons of the soil and is specially performed on the eve of Holi festival when the spring season starts.

Rajasthan is known for its "Khayal" dance-dramas. The themes are from the great Hindu epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. The Bhawai caste which is said to originate from the Jats, whose hereditary profession is dancing, enact these dance-dramas and have innumerable ballets; some of them are humorous depicting the characters of 'baniyas', barbers and moneylenders, who are considered to be the exploiters. Being humorous in nature the audience does not mind the bitterest satires. The women do not take part in Bhawai dances. Among the items the following are very popular: "Bohara-Bohari", "Surdas", "Lodi-Badi", "Dokari", "Shankari", "Bikaji", etc.

Some of the wandering tribes exhibit dances as well as rope and other acrobatic tricks, and while showing these tricks they dance. Such tribes are the Karvelias (snake-charmers), Bagarias, Nats, Banjaras and others. The snake-charmers sing the "Panihari" and the "Idoni" tunes and dance with the accompaniment of the flute, which is called "Pungi", made of dried gourd. Their "Shankaria"

dance, performed by gaily dressed men and women is very pleasing. The theme relates the story of a young man who is in love with a girl. The girl, unfortunately, is in love with another boy.

The Kamad tribe in their dances depict the pastoral life. The men sing and play on a single string instrument, called "Ektara", while the women who have small cymbals tied all over their bodies in a particular manner, dance. Through their gestures they depict actions of cleaning, thrashing, cutting and removing the corn, kneading the flour, preparing breads, making ghee out of curd, spinning on the spinning wheel and winding the yarn.

During the Holi festival the Bagati woman goes from door to door and the man plays on the "Chang".

The Sidh Jats of the Thar desert have their fire dance, which they perform on fire, during March-April at a mela held in honour of Guru Jasnath to the accompaniment of songs, drums and pipes, to commemorate Guru Gorakhnath.

The "Kathputli" dance is a puppet dance, where the Kathputli player holds a string in his hands and manipulates the various movements of the wooden dolls or of dolls made of cotton pads. He places two cots in a vertical position and ties a curtain horizontally. Behind this curtain another plain curtain is hung up as the back curtain which hides the Kathputliwala with his hands on the control board of threads guiding the movement of the puppets. His wife sings and plays on the small drum (dholak). The stories of the bravery of Amar Singh Rathore and other chieftains are sung by her.

The tribe of the Bhils were in olden days wont to dance ritual war dances before going into battle against hostile neighbouring tribes. The object of these dances was to obtain success in battle by going through an imitation of a successful battle beforehand. Shadows of these dances survive today among the same people their weapons having been replaced by sticks. Sometimes these dances precede, with an air of ritual solemnity still, the hunting parties of the community.

A more vigorous memory of the old war dance survives among the Bhils of Gwalior where members of the community dance to the accompaniment of a big *dhol* (drum), ferociously brandishing pieces of wood, long sticks or bows. This dance definitely retains more of its original character than the dances of the Bhils in other districts of Madhya Bharat. That there is a more tender side to the nature of the Bhil, is shown in other dances which depict romantic themes of the sometimes tragic love of a young man for some beautiful maiden. These dances are very popular among the community, and are certain evidences of the fundamentally sentimental character of an erstwhile bloodthirsty and aggressive tribe.

Among these dances are "Ger" and "Naja". They dance with abandon these dances with "Thali" (plates) and "Madal", (a kind of earthen drum) or even sometimes with baskets and brooms during Holi festival. They dance in a circular fashion with sticks with the accompaniment of a big "Dholak" and "Thali". They sing "Gaun ko Thakor, Gher ko Chakor", meaning thereby that the lord of the village is a servant of the "Gher." Among their tender dances is the "Gauri" dance in which "Shiva-Parvati" episodes are enacted.

CHAPTER IX

GUJERAT

Gujerat is the home of the famous "Garba" dances, performed on several occasions, varying from the Navaratra (nine-night pujas) and celebrations of the Krishna-Lila to rites connected with the invocations of sterile women at the Dwarika shrine, to which women flock from all parts of India.

There seem to be various possible explanations of the word 'garba'. In connection with the ordinary festivals, the word may be derived from one or both of two sources, (a) The song which is sung with these dances is known as 'garba', and would obviously lend its name to the dance with which it is associated, and (b) the girls of Gujerat dance, carrying on their heads a white earthen pot, its sides cut out into designs of flowers, leaves, etc. The pot is called a 'garbi', the word here being a diminutive of the Sanskrit word 'ghat' meaning pot.

During the Navaratra festival when the worship of Kali and other goddesses is kept up for a period of nine nights, each household has its 'garbi' pot, kept in a place of honour, and illuminated from within by small wick floating in a shallow saucer of clarified butter. As the sides of the pot are cut out into attractive designs, the illuminated pot is a very pretty sight, and the procession of girls who go from house to house to perform the

'garba' dances during this festival, form a particularly pleasing spectacle since each one carries on her head an illuminated 'garbi' pot.

During the nine nights of Navaratra, the girls of the village go from house to house, bearing their 'garbis' and then make a circle about the household 'garbi'; dance and sing, led by the woman of the house, who afterwards offers specially prepared sweetmeats to her guests, sweets consecrated to the goddess in whose honour the puja is being held. Such consecrated sweets are known as 'prasad' and are a common feature of every religious festival throughout the whole country.

During the dance, the leader of the group of performers sings the first line of the 'garba' song, which is repeated by the rest in chorus, the whole song being accompanied by the movements of the ritual dance, and time being stressed by clapping their hands rhythmically on every 'tal' or beat. They bend sideways gracefully at every clap, the hands sweeping in beautifully formed gestures, upwards or downwards or to the side, in order to make the clap.

'Garba' is the ceremony in which everyone takes part, irrespective of caste, or social position. The dances are accompanied by the beating of the 'dholak' (drum), and recently the harmonium has also been unfortunately introduced.

In Kathiawar, the Rasa dances or Krishna-Lila dances are performed after the 'garba' style, with this difference, that men also take part in their performance. In some places, the dances have become exclusively male performances. In some of these, the rhythm is provided by the dancers themselves, who shake short sticks to the ends of which are attached bunches of small brass bells.

Musicians outside the circle of dancers also provide further accompaniment with other instruments of percussion, of which there are an infinite variety.

The songs of 'garba' are often of great antiquity, having been handed down orally for innumerable generations, and since many of them are of great beauty, there is an attempt being made now to collect them and get them written down, before they get lost or forgotten by a community which every year becomes more and more sophisticated as the result of the spread of an urban education which seems to breed in the minds of its recipients a contempt for the quaint and traditional customs of the community to which they belong.

Some years ago in the "Modern Review", there appeared a most interesting article by Mr. J. C. Roy, on the associations and origins of the 'garba' dances of Gujerat. Mr. Roy traced the origin of the word to the Sanskrit 'garbha', which can mean either 'uterus', or the unborn child in the uterus. Since 'garba' is danced at the famous shrine at Dwarika to which sterile women are wont to make pilgrimage, it seems that the 'garba' pot may be a symbol of the uterus, and the lamp inside, a figure of the life in the uterus desired by the visitants to the shrine. Among the most orthodox in Hindu society is considered very important indeed that there should be offspring to perform the posthumous rites so necessary for the well-being of the parents' souls in the after-life. Therefore, the pilgrims to the Dwarika shrine, having made their offerings with song and dance, receive a branding on the palms of the hands from the priests of the shrine, which signifies that they have given birth to a child and are no more barren. Whether or no a child is actually born to these

women at any later time, the very fact of their having performed the *pūja* and received the marks on the palms of their hands, entitles them to be burnt by anyone, and this burning is as efficacious as if performed by a son.

The "Tippani" dance is performed by women of the Kharava caste, who have specialised in the making of floors of houses by beating with a stick known as "Dhabro" with flat bottomed bases and bells ("ghungroos" tied at the end), executing synchronised work-movements in perfect unison, levelling up the imaginary floor. They either dance in a circle or in semi-circle. The fishermen's dance in these parts is known as "Padhara" dances.

CHAPTER X

CEYLON, ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR

Kandyan Dance

The hill station of Kandy, situated almost at the middle of the island of Ceylon, away from the sea shores, narrates a fantastic tale of natural beauty. Drowsy, flower-fragrant, a gem of rare splendour set amidst the picturesque hills, Kandy sleeps dreamily reflecting her delicate beauty in the still waters of her limpid lake. Being constantly surrounded by the romance in nature the original inhabitants of this place naturally have imbibed the beauty in nature, its simplicity and innocence.

When I speak of the inhabitants of Kandy, I do not mean the Anglicised dwellers of the locality with gorgeous silk, perfume and with tailormade western cut attires, but those ignorant folks wearing unending smiles on their lips, bare-bodied, and living in bamboo thatched huts on the outskirts of the terraced paddy fields, worshipping their fetish deities. It is natural for these people to be art-minded, and they, in due course, have contributed to the art world a dance form which is peculiarly their own, speaking of the verve and the simplicity of the land.

You can hear the tolling bells of the passing elephants on the highway, the bells ringing in the nearby innumerable Buddhist monasteries being

harmonised with the anklets of these sturdy Kandyan dancers, when you gaze across far reaching valleys where the river Mahaweli courses over channels strewn with massive rocks, and see Hunasgiriya Peak towering above stretches of green slopes where palms, rice-fields and foliage make checker-board patterns of green and gold.

I got an opportunity to witness a few original Kandyan dance items, devoid of all sophistication, at the village of Polgahawela, performed by three rustic male dancers, and in the gardens of a big business magnate by a few small petite girls. The numbers delved deep into my mind, an impression, festival of beauty, an unforgettable experience, long to be cherished. The feeling of absolute perfection passed to an audience held transfixed by their performance. The sinuous arms of the males and the wonderfully supple bodies of the belles were moving in a perfect accord in a union of rhythm and feeling. Their grace and expressiveness kept me enthralled. The simple and appealing mimicry with queer music (which I could not follow being ignorant of the language) provided a fitting setting for the virtuosity. There was charm and freedom in their "Gajigawaname" (elephant dance) and "Wesbadima" (peacock dance).

By looking at the undulating sinuous movements of male dancers one feels that one is actually seeing herds of wild elephants taking their bath in a jungle spring, and at the serene faces of those little damsels, as if the trees and lawns have all vanished, and in their place a remarkable picture of Bodhisattva springs up to the throb of strings and drums and soft pipes discoursing elusive music, clear and cool and translucent.

Rhythm of the rippling river, a swan's grace, daintiness of a flower, a melody in motion, a lyric and war song, that was the dance of the girls at Ceylon. It was one of the most remarkable experiences I have ever had.

To me it seems that the Kandyan dance though originated from this romantic city of which it bears the name, has spread over the whole of the island in its diversified forms. In villages near-about it has maintained its purity and originality, but as is evident and natural it has undergone some sophistication in the towns, being influenced by the modern trends in dance art.

Undoubtedly the Kandyan dance art bears affinity to Bharata Natyam type of dancing of South India in technique, grace, female costume to some extent and movements, especially the gesture of standing with knees bent sideways and the movements of the hands and palms.

Occasionally the dancer comes forward with slow steps as the singing goes on, stops standing bow-legged with head stooping down and hands outstretched, palms moving in all the directions and with the finish of a strain, retraces his steps, moves sideways and then violently dances with wild steps. Sometimes he jumps, whirls and slithers keeping his hands drooping down. Everything he does keeping intact with the emotion and expressing the theme of the music, in accordance with the rhythm emanating from the big drums and the cymbals.

His costume consists of a frilled white cloth garment with gathers at the waist in all directions, and having bold and deep red wide border from the waist falling up to the knees, in a somewhat skirt-like fashion. The upper part of the body

from the waist remains bare. The girls put on 'Cholis' (short bodices). Sometimes the male dancer wears long white socks up to the thigh. The ornaments comprise of a richly decorated head-gear ("Westanna"), with a black or deep green plume at the back, a breast-plate, "Hangeli" artistically decorated by small broken tin pieces and coloured glasses, bangles on the wrists and the upper arms "Valalu", and anklets ("Silambu"). A hollow copper tube with small iron balls inside it and moulded in a round shape, furnish him with an anklet. The dancer uses a waist strap ("Innadi") also.

The orchestra consists of usually two big drums ("Berangas"), somewhat like "Mridangam" and middle-sized cymbals ("Talampata"). The chorus provides songs and the background music. The drum beating is very slow at the time of singing, but when the vocal music stops the drums are at their excellence with haunting percussive and rhythmic effects.

Among the folk-dances of Ceylon the devil-dances are still prevalent in the country. The ordinary villager has by no means got over his belief in devils, and the devil dancers, who are still a numerous body in the island, are specially employed in case of disease, which is put down to possession by some particular devil. Masks are worn over the face, varying according to the disease, and jingling bells and other adornments on the body, the great dances are kept up in the patient's house to drive away the devil concerned.

Devil dancers also take part in "Peraheras" and other functions. The "Perahera" is a religious procession, and the principal one takes place in Kandy every August for a fortnight, ending at

the full moon. It is then that all roads lead to Kandy. Richly caprisoned elephants, tom-tom beaters, Kandyan dancers, and chieftains in jewelled costumes walking in stately procession, all combine to make this the most spectacular pageant that can be seen anywhere.

Another kind of devil dancing, specially characteristic of Ceylon, is "Yakkun Nautuma". This is a violent male dance used primarily as a means of exorcism. It is performed in cases of sickness. The possessing Yakshas, regarded as demons causing disease, are first invited by beat of drum to attend the performance; afterwards having been thus entertained, they are asked to take their departure.

The greatest amusement among the tribes of the Andamans, indeed their chief object in life after the chase is the whole-night dance party. The dancing itself is comprised of a curious and monotonous set of movements performed by drumming the feet in various time-patterns on a special sounding board, shaped like a Crusader's shield, and often mistaken for a shield by the casual observer, the dancers meanwhile chanting a song limited in compass to a range of four semi-tones and the intermediate quarter-tones, stressing the time by clapping their hands against the thighs in strict unison. This dance takes place any night, when there are sufficient people gathered together. At special meetings of the tribes, it becomes ceremonial, and is continued for several nights in succession, both sexes taking allotted parts in it. This and turtle-hunting are the only things in life which arouse energetic interest in the Andamanese mind.

The dance of the Nicobarese is a circular dance performed indoors, or nearby the village houses,

except in the north where the villages have assembly houses in which social functions can take place. The dancers form a chain by laying their arms across each others' backs, with the hands resting on the next person's shoulder. Both sexes join, but in separate groups, and the dancers provide their own vocal accompaniment. There is a leader who intones the songs and directs the steps, which are variations on a pattern formed by taking a step right and then one to the left, followed by a jump in strict unison, the dancers landing low on both heels.

The Nicobarese are a musical people with clear, harmonious voices. They are adept at composing songs for special occasions particularly acrostic songs. They have a flageolet and a stringed instrument made of bamboo, on which they are able to accompany themselves.

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